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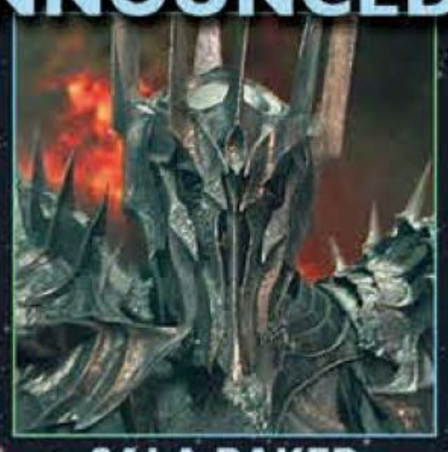
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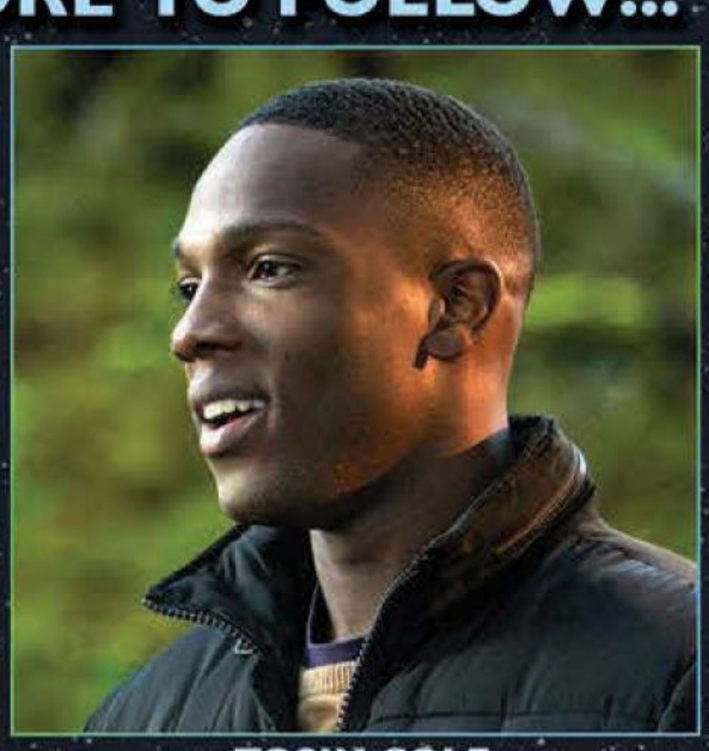
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STAR TREK



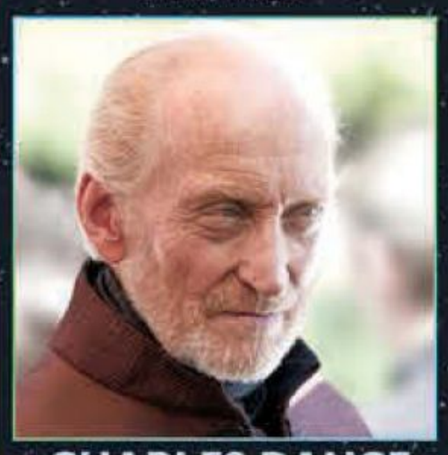
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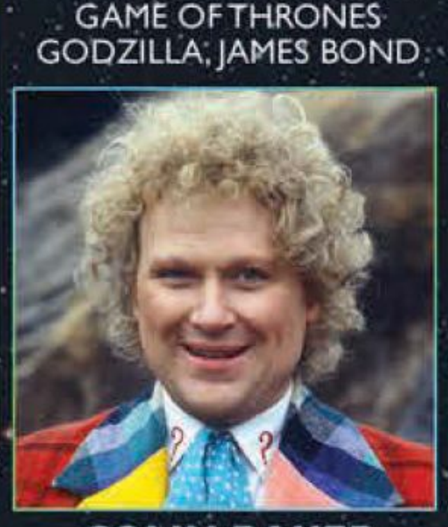
CHARLES DANCE
GAME OF THRONES
GODZILLA, JAMES BOND



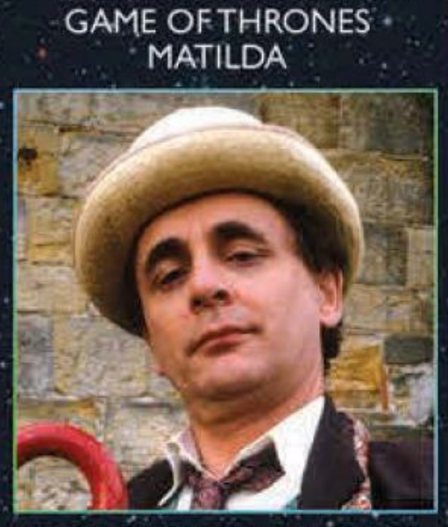
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SFN 165
Welcome



It seems like a very long time ago that we first saw that picture of the *Star Wars: Episode VII* read-through. The cast assembled with JJ Abrams, everyone from Hamill, Fisher and Ford, to the fresh-faced newbies. We wondered who would be playing who, as Carrie Fisher chatted with Daisy Ridley while John Boyega and Oscar Isaac sat across from Adam Driver.

Now, five years later, the end is in sight for the new trilogy and everything has changed in the meantime. The *Star Wars* saga is expanding into TV, spin-offs and standalones (although not from David Benioff and DB Weiss, as was confirmed just before going to print), online speculation and disagreement is stronger than it has ever been, and the world lost Carrie Fisher.

But a trilogy closer is a celebration as much as it is an ending. This new story has reinvigorated the franchise and introduced a whole new generation to a galaxy far, far away as Rey, Finn, Poe, Kylo, Rose and more found their way into our hearts. We talked to the cast and crew of *The Rise Of Skywalker* to find out how they will be bringing this chapter of the franchise to the perfect conclusion.

Elsewhere, Henry Cavill wigs up and rides out to slay monsters in the long-awaited Netflix series of *The Witcher*, we talk to the team behind the BBC's *War Of The Worlds* about bringing HG Wells' classic story back to the book, we brave parallel worlds to preview the final series of *The Man In The High Castle* and we find out how *Jumanji: The Next Level* will take things to, well, the next…level.

We've also got a rare interview with Cixin Liu, one of the greatest SF writers currently working, a complete history of the *Jaws* saga from Spielberg to Caine via 3D, M Night Shyamalan discusses his chilling new TV series *Servant*, and we pay tribute to 25 years of glorious gothic vamping in *Interview With The Vampire*.

So, dive in as we look ahead and look back, and head for one last Skywalker saga…



Jonathan Hatfull, Editor

GET EXCITED ABOUT THE MANDALORIAN

While we still wait in a state of deep frustration for the UK release date for *The Mandalorian*, and the whole of Disney+ for that matter, we can at least keep half-reading potentially spoilery bits of information. Anyone who wants to go in cold had best start muting keywords on Twitter as the bounty hunter hits the US this month, so fingers crossed that whatever's holding him back from arriving here is resolved really soon.



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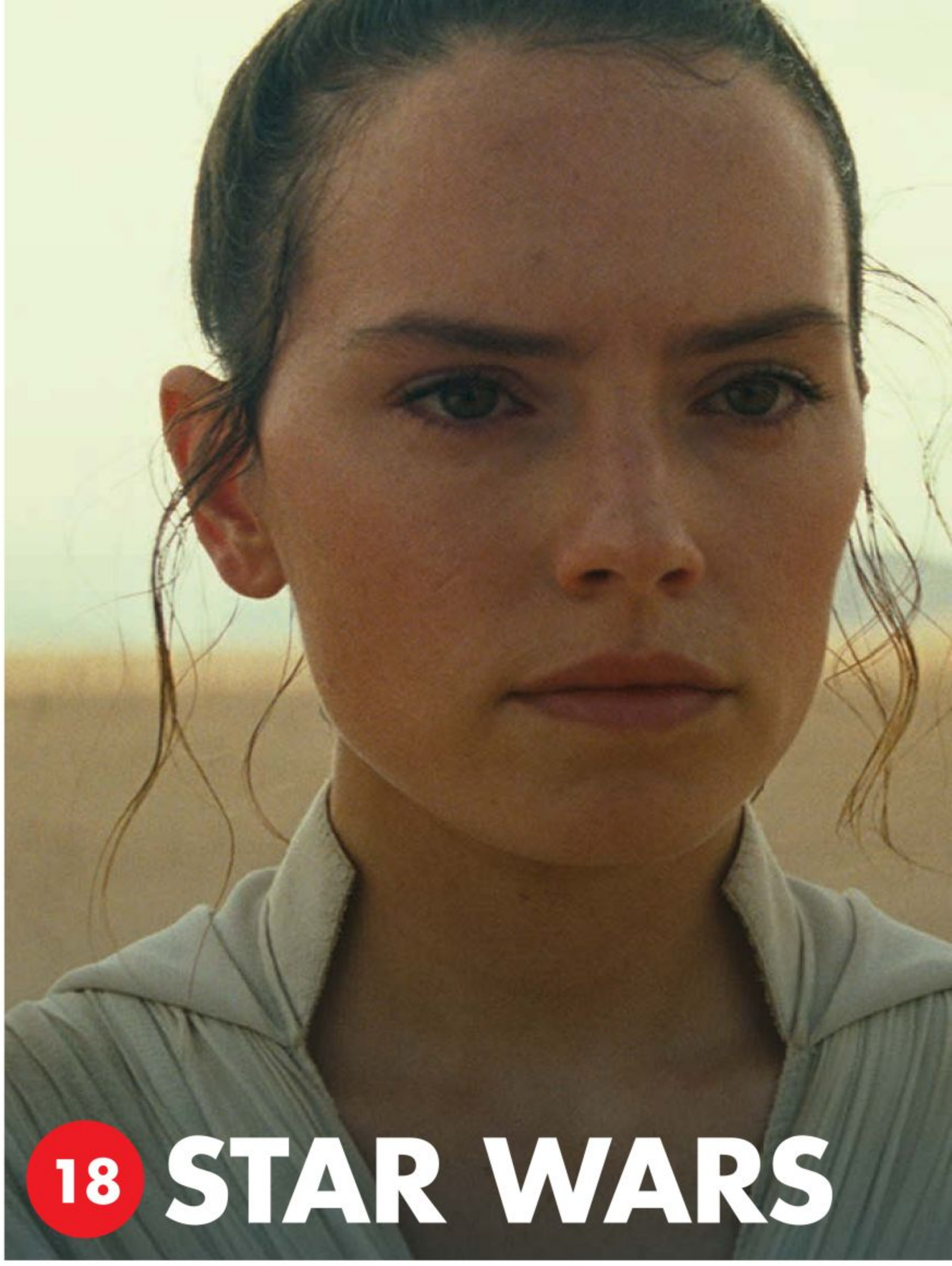
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Your first sneak-peek at the next issue of *SciFiNow*.

MEET THE TEAM

Q. Which Star Wars character or story do you want to have its own movie/show?



JONATHAN HATFULL
EDITOR

A. Bor Gullet
It doesn't have to only be about Bor Gullet but I have questions about his allegiances, agenda, how Bor ended up with Saw...



ABIGAIL CHANDLER
DEPUTY EDITOR

A. Chirrut Îmwe
More Force-worshipping warrior monks please!



POPPY-JAY PALMER
NEWS EDITOR

A. Poe Dameron
Just Poe, BB-8 and a TIE fighter exploring the galaxy and charming the locals for maybe six seasons.



MARCUS FAINT
ART EDITOR

A. The Jedi Academy
Think Grange Hill, with lightsabers… Now try and tell me that doesn't sound like a recipe for success!



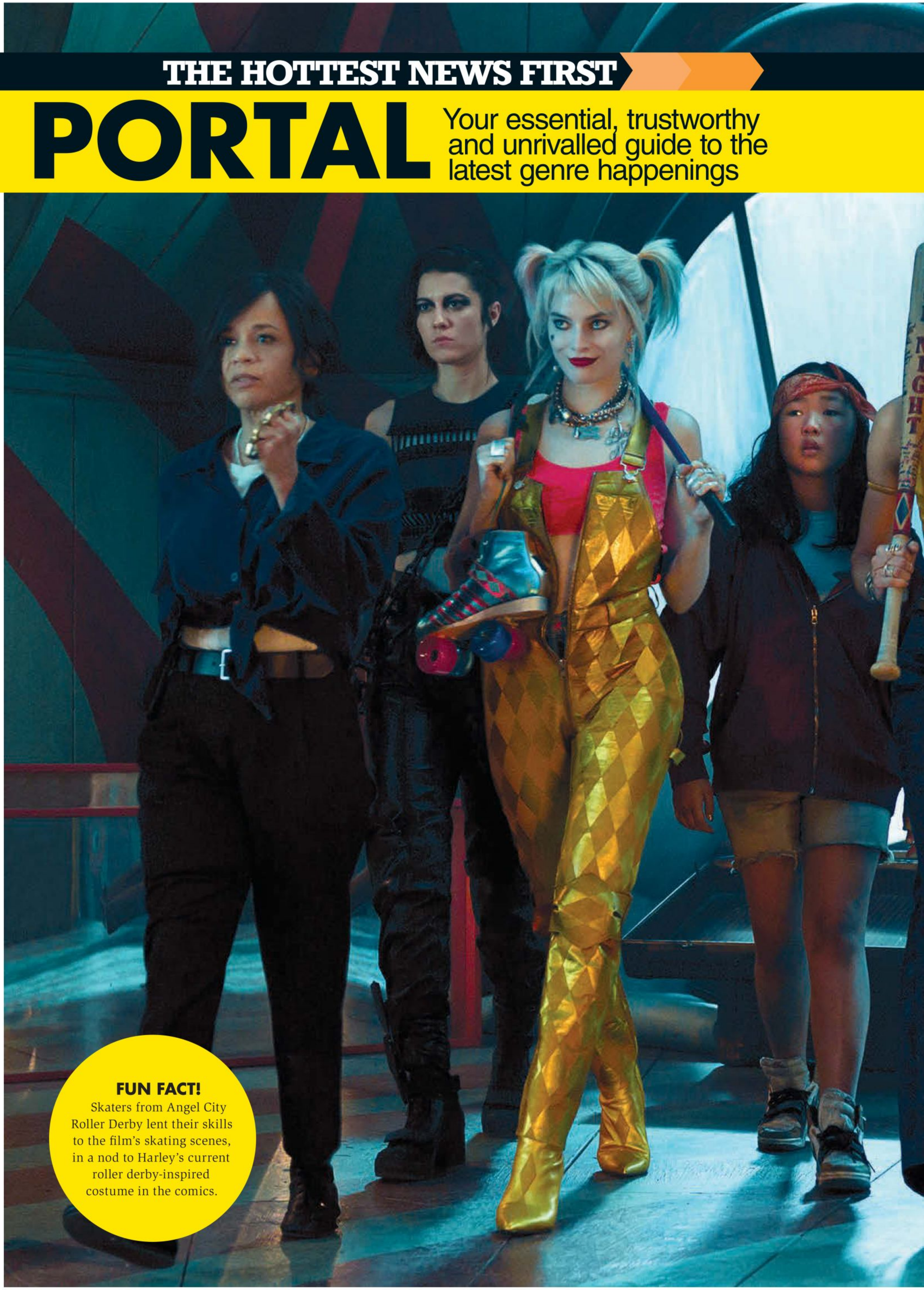
RACHAEL HARPER
SUB EDITOR

A. DJ
A heist movie with crafty DJ and wily Maz Kanata taking on a big job and getting into a lot of fun and trouble on the way.

THE HOTTEST NEWS FIRST

PORTAL

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FUN FACT!

Skaters from Angel City Roller Derby lent their skills to the film's skating scenes, in a nod to Harley's current roller derby-inspired costume in the comics.

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Inside the smash-hit sequel series

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Teens take on zombies in the untitled spin-off series

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Talking all things genre with the star of Ant-Man and Dune

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Prepare your eyes for this dazzling new anime film



FLYING HIGH

Harley Quinn is back and she's not alone. Here's why we can't wait for Birds Of Prey...

WORDS **ABIGAIL CHANDLER**

DC'S BIRDS OF Prey are getting their big screen debut alongside Margot Robbie's break-out character in *Birds Of Prey (And The Fantabulous Emancipation Of One Harley Quinn)*. Here's why you should be eagerly anticipating this film…

HARLEY QUINN IS BACK, PUDDIN' – AND SHE'S A FREE AGENT NOW

Suicide Squad was not exactly a universally loved movie. However, it did spawn one hit that everyone could agree on: Margot Robbie's unhinged performance as Harley Quinn. But as great as Robbie was, she wasn't given much to do beyond grin maniacally in short-shorts. Now, with Robbie also serving as a producer on *Birds Of Prey*, she's promising a lot more autonomy for Harley in this film, especially now that she's cut off from her unhealthily dependent relationship with Jared Leto's Joker.

IT'S THE LIVE-ACTION FILM DEBUT OF A TONNE OF GREAT DC LADIES

The Birds Of Prey are a generally all-female superhero team, traditionally with Barbara Gordon (Batgirl/Oracle), Black Canary and Huntress at its heart. Babs is missing this time round – DC, it seems, sees her as worthy of her own origin film – but Black Canary (played by Jurnee Smollett-Bell) and the Helena Bertinelli version of Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) are both present and correct, as is another former Bird of Prey-er, the one-time Batgirl Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco). The film also brings in Detective Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), a character who, in the comics, later goes on to have a superhero alias of her own.

THE FILM FEATURES SOME FAN-FAVOURITE GOTHAM CITY VILLAINS

After initially toying with assassin David Cain standing as the film's main villain, director Cathy Yan and writer Christina Hodson decided on Black Mask instead, played by the distinctly mask-free Ewan McGregor. He's joined by Chris Messina as Victor Zsasz, the assassin last seen being played by Anthony Carrigan in *Gotham*.

Jared Leto teased some time ago on Instagram that his Joker could be making an appearance in the film, but that post has since been deleted, so who knows if the Clown Prince of Crime will be making an appearance. There's also the question of who Ali Wong will be playing in the film, as her role remains unrevealed. Could Lady Shiva be on the cards, or will Wong be playing to her comedic strengths instead?

FUN FACT!
Check out Renee Montoya's hair-do in the poster – it's structured to look like a hat worn at a jaunty angle, as a nod to her eventual Question costume from the comics.

IT'S GOING TO BE R-RATED

The days of comic book adaptations shying away from R-ratings seem to be long behind us, with *Birds Of Prey* following in the footsteps of *Deadpool, Logan* and *Joker*. But don't expect it to be a dark, serious drama like *Joker* – this Harley isn't his Harley, after all. Robbie had said that her goal with this film is to make Harley less sexy and more fun, so we can expect a lot of humour.

THIS WON'T BE THE LAST WE SEE OF HARLEY

Robbie is one of only a handful of actors reprising their roles from *Suicide Squad* in James Gunn's sequel/relaunch, *The Suicide Squad*. She will also – depending on the success of *Birds Of Prey* – be starring in further *Harley* movies, including the long-rumoured, possibly dead, *Gotham City Sirens* (whether that would include the newly-cast Zoe Kravitz as Catwoman, however, remains unclear).



Birds Of Prey is released on 7 February 2020.



BREAKING NEWS

Small screen news in brief

STATION ELEVEN

Emily St John Mandel's highly acclaimed post-apocalyptic novel is coming to HBO Max, with *Black Mirror's* Mackenzie Davis and *Yesterday's* Himesh Patel facing a super flu-ravaged world. Patrick Somerville, who gave us *Maniac*, is show running and the brilliant Hiro Murai (*Atlanta, Barry*) is directing.

FOUNDATION

After years in development hell, Isaac Asimov's SF novel *Foundation* has been snapped up by Apple TV. Lee Pace stars as the emperor of the galaxy while Jared Harris will play the maths genius who thinks the empire is about to come crumbling down. David Goyer and Josh Friedman will be shepherding the ten episode series.

RED DWARF

Finally! Frankly we've been very patient waiting for news about what's next for the boys from the Dwarf, and now we finally know what that is: a two hour feature length special. Obviously we've not been told anything about plot details but with the show back on form over the last couple of years, we cannot wait.

ADVENTURE TIME

Just when you thought we'd seen the last of Finn and Jake! We might not be getting a new series but we are getting four all-new hour-long specials called *Adventure Time: Distant Lands*. Interestingly, the specials will air on HBO Max rather than Cartoon Network but it seems safe to assume this doesn't mean a sudden shift in tone…

WHAT A TIME TO BE **ALIVE**

John McPhail on bringing Anna And The Apocalypse to Blu-ray

WORDS **JONATHAN HATFULL**

We're huge fans of John McPhail's horror comedy high school Christmas zombie musical *Anna And The Apocalypse*, so we were delighted to learn that a new extras-loaded Blu-ray release is on the way.

"When you say: 'Oh, it's a zombie musical set at Christmas' some people go: 'Oh right, is it?' It's when people see it and they go: 'Wow, that isn't what I expected it to be,'" says McPhail.

After showing it at festivals in the US and the UK, the film was trimmed for various releases but the new Blu-ray will feature that longer festival cut with a missing song back in play. "When I was told we're going to cut it down for the Americans it broke my heart a bit," remembers McPhail. "The original cut, I think there are pacing issues with it, but I'm looking forward to people seeing 'Which Side Are You On?'"

It's been a year since the film was first released in cinemas but the audience is still growing, and the director tells us that he's thrilled people are still discovering it. "We always knew this film was going to be a discovery film," he explains. "So everybody that shouts about it on Twitter, everybody that shares it, likes it on Instagram or dresses up as Anna or John for Christmas or for Comic Con, they're doing so much work for us that it's unreal and it's just because they're sharing the love of it."

And while we wait for a singalong screening, McPhail will have a dream come true in Glasgow this Christmas. "The GFT is playing *Anna And The Apocalypse* in amongst *Elf* and *Home Alone* and that's incredible, that's the pinnacle of where we want to be so I'm hoping there's going to be people who go along, who have a couple of drinks and all sing along and stamp their feet and clap their hands because that's what the film is for."

Anna And The Apocalypse is available on Blu-ray from 2 December from Second Sight.







STILL WATCHING

HBO's small-screen follow up to Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' seminal comic is thrilling viewers. We talk to Tom Mison who plays Mr Phillips about the show (with spoilers to episode four)

WORDS **ABIGAIL CHANDLER**

As Damon Lindelof's *Watchmen* approaches its halfway point, it's beginning to reveal some of its cards. We now know that Jeremy Irons' 'Lord of the Manor' is actually Adrian Veidt, the former Ozymandias and the chief villain of the original comic, and that his servants, Miss Crookshanks and Mr Phillips, played by *Sleepy Hollow* actor Tom Mison, are a legion of clones. Mison tells us that he approached the role "as if they're toddlers trying to please the master, and trying to learn as quickly as they can, before they get squashed or burnt or stabbed". It's fair to say that poor Phillips meets a number of violent ends at the hands of Veidt, and that, according to Mison: "Jeremy seems to enjoy it more and more!"

A fan of the comics, Mison had no worries about taking on a role in a sequel to *Watchmen* because "if anyone has safer hands than Damon, I'm yet to figure out who that would be". He adds that "tackling white supremacy in modern day America is as bold and ballsy and terrifying as tackling the Cold War when Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons were doing it in the Eighties." But Mison's experience of filming the show was far removed from the main storylines in Tulsa, as his scenes were the first to be filmed, even before full scripts for the rest of the show had been written. The 'country manor' scenes act as "a nice intermission for the audience", and Mison thinks "that's clever of Damon, to take you out at choice moments from the heaviness and the intrigue of the main story and have something that at first glance just seems like a bit of a sinister folly." Despite the apparent separateness of their story, Mison promises that "over the course of the show, our story and their story begins to merge."

Despite spending most of the shoot in something that seems more *Downton Abbey* than superhero show, Mison got to enjoy some nerdy moments, not least when he donned the Dr Manhattan blue body paint. "I looked at my blue hand and I thought 'fuck, I'm Dr Manhattan!' That was amazing," he says. One of the show's biggest fan-pleasing moment came when Irons dons the Ozymandias costume. "I screamed like a schoolgirl, I was so excited," Mison says of seeing Irons in costume. "He was just trying to get the gusset to be more comfortable, and I was getting over-excited about it. It was a reminder of the fact that we're in fucking *Watchmen*! It's amazing!"

Watchmen is currently airing on Sky Atlantic.

TEENAGE ZOMBIE DREAM

Creators Scott M Gimple and Matthew Negrete and EP Robert Kirkman take us behind the scenes of The Walking Dead's latest spin-off series…

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**
INTERVIEWS **ADAM TANSWELL**

FOLLOWING 2015'S FEAR *The Walking Dead*, the third series instalment in the *TWD* franchise is getting ready to pack up and leave once again for a look at a brand-new community. Unusually, the new series still doesn't have a title, but it's set to follow the first generation to come of age in the zombie apocalypse. However, we expect the cast of teenagers to have to contend with much more than regular growing pains. According to the series' synopsis, some will become heroes, some will become villains, but in the end all of them will be changed forever.

For a better idea of what's to come we speak with the show's creators, including *The Walking Dead* producer Scott M Gimple and series showrunner Matthew Negrete. After growing up since the start of the apocalypse, the show's central teenagers have spent their lives in a place of relative safety (compared to Rick Grimes and the gang, at least). Sure, they know about walkers, but they haven't had much cause to interact with them.

"They're affected in different ways by what's happened," explains Gimple. "They don't remember much of a world without walkers. This is the normal world to them, and yet they've been apart from it. They've been in safety. They've been behind walls. There's a quest aspect to this show. They're going somewhere. They have to leave this place of safety to put themselves in a position where they haven't been; where they have to fight for their survival. They also have to fight for what they believe in. It's a different kind of story in the world of *The Walking Dead*. It introduces a new world."

"I've been a writer and producer on *The Walking Dead* since Season Four," says Negrete. "Scott and I know each other well. He tempted me at the end of last season.



He had this idea for a show and we started talking about it, and the first question I asked him was: 'How would you make this different?' Scott said to me that this is about a younger generation. And I immediately said yes. I love the idea of exploring the apocalypse through this different perspective. I love movies like *Stand By Me*. I love coming-of-age stories. Instead of being covered in leeches, you have walkers that are trying to climb all over you."

The upcoming series promises something new simply by way of looking at the apocalypse through a younger perspective. "It's great because everything you go through when you're that age is heightened," Negrete continues. "Everything feels very, hyperreal in a way, and emotions are raw. One thing I had fun thinking about the other day was that, when you're that age, someone can say the wrong thing to you and it's like your heart's been ripped out of your chest – but now you live in a world where your heart can actually be ripped out of your chest. It's almost like it's an interesting parallel to be able to tell those coming-of-age stories in the prism of the apocalypse."

Though all the regular *Walking Dead* threats will be thrown in there – finding food and water, figuring out who to trust and, obviously, the prospect of a grisly death by way of a walker attack – at the heart of the show are the struggles that come with growing up. "[We're starting with] characters in a very young and innocent place," Negrete explains, "and being able to follow them and see them grow up and see who they become. To me, this is also the perfect opportunity to hopefully attract younger people to the franchise. The fans have been so amazing in terms of really loving *The Walking Dead*, but by doing something new, if there are people out there who have not seen *The Walking Dead*, they can jump in from the very beginning and it'll totally make sense because it's a whole new world."

The new series starts in the Midwest, ten years after the start of the apocalypse, but a quest of sorts undertaken by the young cast of characters will be what drives the story. "It's a long journey," says Negrete. "If you're travelling hundreds, or maybe even thousands of miles, that's a tough thing to do normally. But in the apocalypse, imagine all of the obstacles you have to face. Not just environmental obstacles like the weather and terrain, but there are hordes of dead out there. There are people that are maybe good and maybe bad that you're going to encounter that will be obstacles for you, too."

Gimple and Negrete are steering the ship, but *The Walking Dead* creator Robert Kirkman is still involved in the new series in an executive producer capacity, and he's more than excited about what's to come.

"*The Walking Dead* universe is huge and it's getting bigger by the day," Kirman enthuses. "And I think that it's safe to say that this project is expanding that universe in its biggest ways yet. There are a lot of nooks and crannies being discovered. There are a lot of new corners that are being brought into the light. What Scott and Matt have been able to put together is absolutely impressive. When Scott pitched the idea to me, I was so excited. I love the idea of this new generation. And I think this cast is spectacular. They're bringing new life blood to this world. It's going to be absolutely great. And it feels really cool to me because I've moved into this proud grandfather role."

The untitled *The Walking Dead* spin-off series will premiere in 2020.



A whole new perspective for *TWD*.

CASTING CALL

The latest exciting cast additions to the most intriguing projects… WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

The Craft

Based on the 1996 film of the same name, *The Craft* follows Hannah, a high school outcast who falls into a friendship with three other young women and begins experimenting with witchcraft. They unleash a power that slowly consumes them.

EXPECTED RELEASE
TBA

ROLES
MYSTERY MAN: Male, 40+ years old, Caucasian. Good genre status. Must not spook easily.
MYSTERY WOMAN: Female, 40+ years old, Caucasian. Kind of witchy.

CONTACT
lightasafeather@stiffasaboard.com

REPLIES
David Duchovny, Michelle Monaghan

Lisey's Story

EXPECTED RELEASE
TBA

SCOTT LANDON: Male, 40+ years old, Caucasian. The late husband of Lisey. Must be less charismatic than Julianne Moore.

CONTACT
theking@appletvplus.com

REPLIES
Clive Owen

The Batman

EXPECTED RELEASE
12 June 2020

ROLES
COMMISSIONER GORDON: Male, 50+years old, any ethnicity. The police commissioner of Gotham.
CATWOMAN: Female, 20-40 years old, any ethnicity. You know who she is.
THE RIDDLER: Male, 20-40 years old, Caucasian. If you need a description of The Riddler then you don't deserve the role.

CONTACT
mattreeves@batmanforever.com

REPLIES
Jeffrey Wright, Zoë Kravitz, Paul Dano

Venom 2

EXPECTED RELEASE
October 2020

SHRIEK: Female, 30-50 years old, any ethnicity. Possessing the power of flight and sound manipulation, and the ability to tap into other people's minds to bring out their inner darkness, Carnage's famous lover is a villain you really don't want to mess with.

CONTACT
marvelunderlings@sony.com

REPLIES
Naomie Harris

Inferno

Neill Blomkamp's sci-fi thriller follows a cop called in to investigate a murder, but something otherworldly is going on.

EXPECTED RELEASE
TBA

ROLES
COP: Male, 30-40 years old, Caucasian. A cop investigating a murder before something extraterrestrial comes into play.

CONTACT
neillblomkamp@chappielove.com

REPLIES
Taylor Kitsch

The Matrix 4

The fourth instalment in the *Matrix* saga. Hopefully it's better than the last two attempts.

EXPECTED RELEASE
2022

ROLES
MAN 1: Male, 30-40 years old, any ethnicity. Looking for an actor with a face to rival that of Keanu Reeves.
MAN 2: Male, 35-50 years old, any ethnicity. Someone used to putting on a real good show.
WOMAN 1: Female, 20-35 years old, any ethnicity. Charismatic and strong, ideally with combat experience.

CONTACT
lanawachowski@matrixforever.com

REPLIES
Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Neil Patrick Harris, Jessica Henwick



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FIVE THINGS WITH
DAVID DASTMALCHIAN

The writer, actor and superhero fan on his debut comic Count Crowley: Reluctant Midnight Monster Hunter and his genre career…

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

1 DREAMS DO COME TRUE

After spending his life collecting comics, actor David Dastmalchian is getting the chance to pen his own. "I've loved comics my entire life but I never imagined I would be lucky enough to get to write my own," he tells us. "When the opportunity came my wife chuckled because I've had so many dream jobs. She said she'd never seen me like this. I couldn't sleep at night for joy! I was up writing, cutting and pasting old comic books and finding all of my inspiration imagery."

2 INSPIRATION

Count Crowley, published by Dark Horse Comics, follows TV journalist Jerri Bartman as she returns to her small hometown to host the nightly *Creature Feature*. But she gets a lot more than she bargained for upon discovering monsters are real, and they're hell-bent on controlling the news. "The seeds of this comic book grew out of my early years in Kansas watching our local late night horror host, *Crematia Mortem*, and she used to show all the old classic Universal and Hammer horror films," says Dastmalchian.

3 THE DARK KNIGHT

Before he became a familiar face in many of the century's big sci-fi blockbusters, Dastmalchian was working as a telemarketer by day and stage actor by night in Chicago. He got his big break as the Joker's henchman in *The Dark Knight*. "I see the director looking so calm, and I see him taking in this giant, incredible story that he's crafting, and he's chosen *me* to be a tiny part of this," he remembers. "I can see the alley I had slept in in my car when I had been in my worst place in life. Just four blocks away is the comic shop where I spent all my money. And here I was standing on the set of the film that would change cinema."

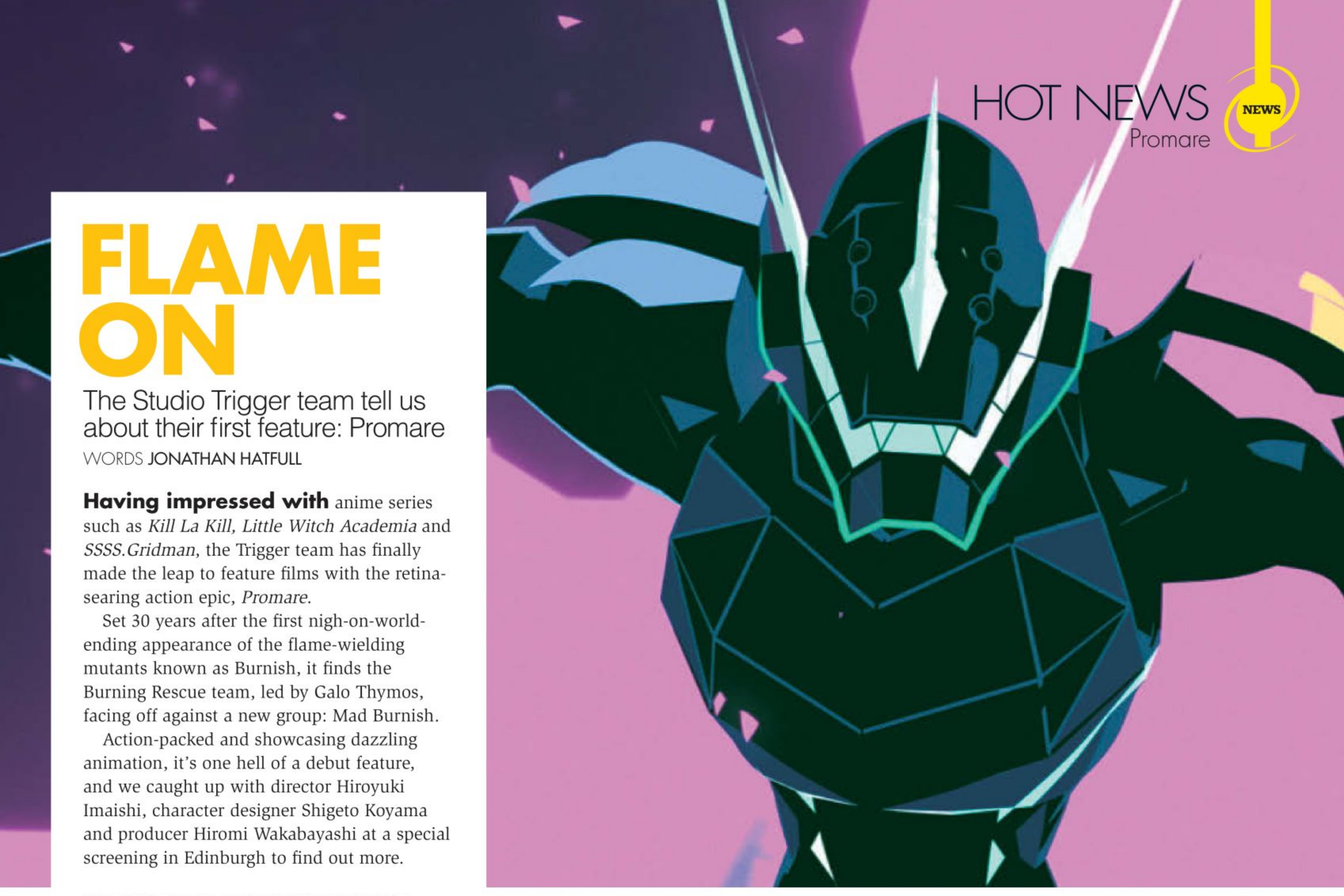
4 MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

Since *The Dark Knight*, Dastmalchian has crossed over to Marvel and then back again to DC. "The light in my imagination was flicked on by comic books, horror and science fiction," he explains. "Once *The Dark Knight* happened, I thought, that was something! That is never going to happen again As the years went by and different opportunities continued to present themselves, as all these talented, incredible directors gave me these opportunities, it turned into almost absurd surrealism."

5 SCI-FI SUPERSTAR

Though he's starred in an number of dramas, it's all about genre for Dastmalchian, and he has the likes of *The Belko Experiment, Bird Box, Blade Runner 2049* and Denis Villeneuve's upcoming *Dune* on his CV. "I believe that Denis is the new voice of science fiction cinema," he enthuses. "I think he's one of the greatest minds of cinema, and the fact that I got to be part of his vision for the future in *Blade Runner 2049*, the fact that he invited me to be in *Dune*, I find it to be stunningly surreal and I don't take a moment of it for granted. You have long days, you haven't seen your kids, and or you're exhausted… But even in the darkest, longest, coldest day, I'm smiling. I feel like I'm a bit mad, and I probably am, because I'm always sitting back, grinning in my little cast chair reading comics books with a cup of coffee."

Count Crowley: Reluctant Midnight Monster Hunter is out now.



FLAME ON

The Studio Trigger team tell us about their first feature: Promare

WORDS **JONATHAN HATFULL**

Having impressed with anime series such as *Kill La Kill, Little Witch Academia* and *SSSS.Gridman*, the Trigger team has finally made the leap to feature films with the retina-searing action epic, *Promare*.

Set 30 years after the first nigh-on-world-ending appearance of the flame-wielding mutants known as Burnish, it finds the Burning Rescue team, led by Galo Thymos, facing off against a new group: Mad Burnish.

Action-packed and showcasing dazzling animation, it's one hell of a debut feature, and we caught up with director Hiroyuki Imaishi, character designer Shigeto Koyama and producer Hiromi Wakabayashi at a special screening in Edinburgh to find out more.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW PROMARE FIRST COME ABOUT?

Hiroyuki Imaishi: We were talking to [writer Kazuki] Nakashima. He was [saying]: "I want to do fire!" – now, it's about fire! But it made sense to him [laughs]. But I was quite happy with it, because for an animator fire is a great thing because it's fluid, so you have to move it, so it was a great challenge for me as an animation director so I was quite happy with this idea.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WHEN MAKING THE LEAP TO A FEATURE FILM?

HI: Technically speaking the most difficult part was the time. Feature films are quite short, so how do we control the time that we've got? How to control the motions of these characters? We actually made a huge effort and we spent so much time working on that. We wanted to do something that we couldn't do for a television series, something that we were hesitant to do.

WAS IT REALLY EXCITING TO DESIGN NEW MECHS?

Shigeto Koyama: The producer told me: "No mechs, you do the characters first! And then once you finish it you can do the mech design!" I really needed to finish the characters first, but it actually took so long that I had to do a rush job with the mechs. So I was quite sad about it because I wanted to work on the mechs a lot. It's a bit like I ordered steak, I knew I wanted to eat steak for the main course, but it took so long to eat the starter that I was quite sad once my steak actually came!

WERE THERE ANY SPECIFIC INSPIRATIONS FOR THE FILM?

Hiromi Wakabayashi: I think the *Fast And Furious* series was a common language for us, for the design team. The three of us wanted to set a goal to make something like that. But it's not about a macho male power thing, it's about entertainment; really genuinely entertaining. Obviously *Fast And Furious* wouldn't win any Oscars but it's a great film nonetheless and we wanted to have a film just like that.

ARE YOU EXCITED TO SEE HOW DIFFERENT AUDIENCES AROUND THE WORLD WILL REACT TO THE FILM?



British punk culture was an influence on the design.



Get ready for spectacular action sequences.

HI: I'm looking forward to the audience reaction in the UK, I'm excited to see different reactions from different countries. For example, in France I'm told many people see the film more than once and I had this image of a French audience preferring more arty movies and *Promare* might be a little bit too much, so I was really happy that the audience loved it. I actually love seeing different responses from different countries.

HW: Galo is designed as kind of punk, a rebellious image so obviously the UK is the country where the British punk came out of so I think I'm influenced by the British culture remotely, so I hope the younger audience will like this movie.

Promare is released in cinemas on 26 November.



THE SAGA ENDS

NINE FILMS. THREE TRILOGIES. THE SKYWALKER SAGA IS FINALLY DRAWING TO A CLOSE – AND WE'VE SPOKEN TO THE CAST AND CREW BEHIND **STAR WARS EPISODE IX: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER**

WORDS **ABIGAIL CHANDLER** INTERVIEWS **ADAM TANSWELL**

There's no ignoring the weight of cinematic history towering over *Star Wars Episode IX: The Rise Of Skywalker.* While further *Star Wars* films and TV shows are in the works, this film will draw a close to the Skywalker Saga that we've been following since 1977's *A New Hope*. Rather than ignoring the weight, the film is drawing attention to it, with a trailer that guides us through iconic moments from the franchise's history, before ending with the Rey vs Kylo Ren battle that's been brewing for the last two instalments. And why not embrace the saga's history? It would be impossible to do anything else, given how invested the film's fanbase is in the Skywalker family and their assorted allies and enemies across the galaxy.

Will the Resistance triumph over the First Order, which rose from the ashes of the old Empire? And when it comes to a fight between the last Skywalker – Kylo Ren – and the last Jedi – Rey – who will win? Who will the fans root for? "[A]s we all know with *Star Wars* fans, some will love it, some will hate it," says returning director JJ Abrams – another fact the film can't ignore, and so chooses to embrace.

The Last Jedi ended with the Resistance on the back-foot, reeling after a heavy defeat and the sacrifice of Luke Skywalker (don't worry – death is never the end for Jedis). Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), after briefly toying with a redemption arc, doubled-down on the evil and became the Supreme Leader of the First Order, intent on stamping out the Resistance, which is run by his mother Leia (Carrie Fisher). "As it always is in *Star Wars* films, the Resistance is in a dire situation," laughs Kelly Marie Tran, who plays Resistance fighter Rose Tico.

John Boyega (Finn) adds that "their numbers are small, there isn't enough support for the Resistance, so now it is a test of friendship and togetherness and family".

But we can also expect fun in amongst the struggles. "What's exciting is you get to see the gang come together now," Poe actor Oscar Isaac says. "They have been isolated on their own journeys, now they come together to work as one unit to fight the First Order."

The Rise Of Skywalker will see Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn and Poe reunited, alongside the likes of Rose, C-3PO (Anthony Daniels), BB-8 and Chewbacca (Joonas Suotama). They will also be joined by a few new additions to the franchise. Keri Russell plays Zorii Bliss, a scoundrel with an unspeakably cool costume and a prior relationship with one of the heroes. "She has sort of a chequered past and slightly



Old enemies must be faced in this final chapter.

questionable morals… she's an old friend of Poe's, and that tells you a bit more about where Poe came from, maybe," Russell teases.

Isaac adds that their reunion is "dynamic" and "high-energy", but refuses to be say exactly what kind of energy is going on between them.

Also joining the team is Naomi Ackie who plays Jannah, a character who "comes in contact with the team at a point where a difference is welcome," Ackie reveals. "She has spent a long time honing a set of skills and I guess in this moment her big thing is whether to use that to fight for and support the good."

Jannah and Zorii's allegiances are yet to be confirmed, but things are possibly more clear-cut for the film's other main new character, the First Order's Allegiant General Pryde, played by Richard E Grant.

Among all the new faces and latest trilogy stars, there's another familiar face re-entering the Skywalker Saga, as Billy Dee Williams returns as Lando Calrissian for the first time since *Return Of The Jedi*. Williams confesses to having "mixed feelings" about returning to the role, especially when he saw himself back in Lando's classic yellow and blue costume. "You're looking at yourself and you're older and you have reservations, but it was interesting. I think I look alright." He tells us that "it was wonderful to be asked to participate, and certainly to work with JJ Abrams, so I looked forward to it and I had a hell of a good time." Lando remained something of an enigma in the original trilogy – a man who initially betrays his old friend Han Solo out of fear of repercussions from the Empire, who then later joins the rebels. His back story was fleshed out by Donald Glover in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, but Williams says that *The Rise Of Skywalker* gives audiences even more of an insight into the character: "I feel that you witness bit more depth than what was presented previously. Working with JJ, he's constantly exploring, so it always becomes layers. I'm curious to see the outcome of those layers."

Williams wasn't the only key player returning to the franchise – JJ Abrams is also back in the director's chair following Rian Johnson's stint behind the camera for *The Last Jedi*. Abrams is the man who brought *Star Wars* back with *The Force Awakens*, but it wasn't his original intention to return to the trilogy. *Episode IX* was originally set to be directed by Colin Trevorrow, but he was fired when his scripts failed to hit the mark, and so Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy brought Abrams back on board – to his surprise. "I couldn't concentrate on *VIII* and *IX*, because I was trying to make *The Force Awakens*," Abrams tells us, explaining that he had little to no say in the direction Johnson took the trilogy in in *The Last Jedi*, but adding that "nothing he was doing undid anything that I thought was where the story would go." There have been criticisms of *The Last Jedi* from certain portions of the fanbase, especially regarding Johnson's decision to essentially wipe out the Jedi Order, and to keep Kylo Ren on the dark side, but Abrams seems to be on board with those things. After all, he's the guy who had Kylo Ren murder Han Solo – an act that arguably put paid to any future redemption. "I have no intention of undoing stuff," Abrams assures us. "It's a continuation of the story. But as you know, stories have turns and twists



BIG SHOES TO FILL

Joonas Suotamo tells us about getting back into character as Chewie

When poor health forced Peter Mayhew to step down from the role of Chewbacca – a role he'd played since 1977 – Joonas Suotamo took over the role of the Wookie. The Finnish actor jokes that his childhood, spent in a country where half the households have saunas, prepared him for the physical challenges of the role. "It was a good pre-school for playing Chewbacca because when you're wearing the costume it can be sweaty."

Despite Chewie being a giant rug that only speaks in roars and shrugs, Suotamo did his research to make sure his performance fitted seamlessly with Mayhew's. "I was watching *The Empire Strikes Back* and everything that Chewbacca does when he's not the centre of attention was important to me. I wanted to learn the essence of Chewbacca, what is he thinking, what kind of core principles does this being have in order to move that like? I surmised that he is stubborn, but also loyal to his friends, he's a defensive force. So he's always looking. Always hovering and looking around because he doesn't know where the next danger is, and that helped me to place myself when we were playing these scenes and I think it works. Some people told me that they didn't know the actor had changed, and that was a great compliment to me."

He says that he wanted to honour Mayhew particularly in this final film of the saga, where he would be responsible for bringing Chewbacca's character journey to a close. "I wanted to do it justice by doing Chewbacca as faithfully as I can while also adhering to the demands of the wonderfully, intricately challenging script that we're executing."

that mean things don't always go in a straight line as you might think."

The cast were happy to be reunited with Abrams as, for many of them, he was the guy who first brought them into the *Star Wars* universe. "He's the most open, collaborative person ever," says Daisy Ridley. "Also I think, because I had worked with him [before], I just immediately felt very safe with him. So I think that's also why I felt good filming it, because when you're safe, you do your best work."

Also reuniting with Abrams, despite being new to *Star Wars*, is Keri Russell, who had previously worked with Abrams on the TV show *Felicity*, and later on *Mission Impossible III*. "I think JJ's secret weapon is that he is a true fan of this kind of movie," she says. "He respects them and honours them, and I think that lends itself well to a franchise like this… JJ loves the toys and the mechanics and the specifics of these creations, but he's also eternally hopeful, and I think that is good for the voice of *Star Wars*."

One of the first challenges facing Abrams when he took over the reins of *Episode IX* was the sad loss of Carrie Fisher, who passed away after completing *The Last Jedi*. It had been said many times that *The Force Awakens* was

"BY FAR, THIS MOVIE IS THE MOST CHALLENGING THING I'VE EVER BEEN A PART OF"

JJ ABRAMS

intended to honour Han Solo, *The Last Jedi* was about Luke, and *Episode IX* was to be Leia's big moment. With Han and Luke gone, Leia was the last link to the original trilogy, and she was intended to be key to *The Rise Of Skywalker*. "It wasn't a strategy," he explains, "it's the story telling you what it needs, and the story was saying it needs Leia to be a part of the story."

Boyega explains that, after the defeat the Resistance suffered in *The Last Jedi*, Leia was crucial to the story in *The Rise Of Skywalker*. "[T]he Resistance was moving forward and was going to create new characters and leaders, but those new characters and leaders still need that guidance from Leia, and that's something that just echoes throughout the whole script. She's really the key to all of this, especially at the lowest moment of hope for the Resistance… And she stands as the main representation of that."

But first they were faced with the challenge of bringing Leia in in a way that honoured Fisher's memory. The first thing Abrams had to do was resist suggestions from some parts of the studio that they simply recast Leia – an idea that repulsed him. "So we were not going to recast her, we were not going to do a CG Leia. And you couldn't do a thing where you're saying 'Leia's off somewhere and she just reported in'. We looked at every version like 'she passed away between the movies', 'she's off talking to…' whatever. Nothing worked. So we started looking at some footage from *The Force Awakens* that we hadn't used." Abrams went through unused Leia scenes from *Episode VII* and looked at them with a fresh eye, wondering how they could work around her side of a scene in order to turn it into something that would work in a meaningful way in *Episode IX*.

"I knew a CG Carrie would have been a disaster, and I knew, even if it looked great, it would just feel wrong," Abrams says, "and so we started to do some tests and it became clear that we could [create new scenes around her cut scenes]. When you're doing reshoots and stuff, a lot of times an actor's not available, and so weirdly it's not like these are brand-new techniques. Some of them are very low tech."

He explains that new scenes were written, keeping the dialogue the same on Leia's side, and then it was about filming the other actor's side of the scene in a way that matched up perfectly with the side Fisher had already filmed. It meant matching the lighting, angles, camera lenses and everything else from Fisher's side of the scene, and the actors filming the new material could watch Fisher's pre-recorded stuff so that they knew what they were acting opposite. Abrams was thrilled with how the scenes turned out, singling out "a couple of scenes with Daisy who is extraordinary, she's incredible, but she was doing scenes with Leia 100%. It was really amazing to watch."

Fitting Leia into the film – while also honouring Fisher and her family – was a big challenge, but far from the only one Abrams and the cast faced. Filming *Star Wars* is always notoriously challenging for cast and crew alike, especially for those who – like Anthony Daniels – are playing non-human characters. Daniels says that one thing that hasn't changed over 42 years of *Star Wars* is the temperature control


The gang is finally back together.

his C-3PO costume. "If it's hot I am unattractively cooking inside. If it's cold they sometimes have to bring hairdryers to push hot air into me. If there's the tiniest lip on set Threepio's toe will find it and I will fall over." The one improvement to have been made to his suit in the new trilogy is in the helmet. "It took half an hour to put the head on before, so they never wanted to take it off. Now it takes six seconds. Thank you JJ!"

Ridley, despite playing a human, faced similar temperature-related struggles. The battle between Rey and Kylo Ren that's seen in the trailer took six days to film, in chilly November. "Everyone was in waterproof gear and I had my arms bare, legs bare, a T-shirt and I said I wasn't going to complain," Ridley says, adding that she's now undone all of her not-complaining at the time by complaining about it interviews afterwards. "Before we started I thought, 'there is no way I'm going to get through six days'. But what I am thrilled about is there is one thing that someone else did, which was a potential ankle break moment, so I wasn't allowed to do it. I did every single other bit of that fight."

During the shoot on *The Rise Of Skywalker*, Ridley gained her greenbelt in kickboxing, and has now become adept at the sword fighting skills required to handle a lightsabre. Being able to do the fights herself was clearly important to Ridley, especially when the conflict between Rey and Kylo Ren is so central to the trilogy. "The connection that was made [between them], and the false connections, what is done cannot be undone," she says tactfully, when asked about their relationship in *The Rise Of Skywalker*. "But story-wise, it's so major that it's very contentious, as you can see," she adds, referring to the controversy surrounding the two characters.

As well as pulling together the sort of action and adventure you'd expect from a *Star Wars* film, Abrams was also keen to try new techniques, and give the cast more flexibility than usual. Boyega tells us that Abrams took a more fluid approach, allowing for scenes that were "loose, long, space for improv, space for chemistry. Because this is an ensemble cast now, we're back together, so there's a lot of banter and we just require looser energy." Abrams took this new fluidity throughout the film, something Boyega tells us was one of the most satisfying aspects of this film for him. "He did mention to us that he wanted to do more fluid shots, he wanted to try some new inventive stuff. Half the time I didn't understand what was going on, I was like 'why is that camera over there when we're running over here?' he's like 'don't worry, it's cool', and he's trying some inventive stuff… I've always been left a bit hungry as a fan just for a bit more," Boyega admits. "So JJ's giving us the freedom to do that, and he's a fan himself, you can really tell from the script and the ideas."

Abrams has embraced that fluidity across all aspects of the movie, right from the beginning of planning out the story. "I'd be lying if I said we knew every twist, every turn, every move, but I knew certain things, and we just tried to go with that as much as we could." He reminds us that George Lucas was the one who taught him that the best idea should always win, and you should be open to a better idea coming to you – after all, Abrams owns a poster for '*Revenge Of The Jedi*', before Lucas thought better of it at the 11th hour and renamed the film.

"[Abrams is] very fluid with that sort of thing, constantly searching and hungry, not resting on anything," Isaac confirms. "Looking for how to make it better, more impactful." It's a skill that you need, especially when planning the final chapter in a four-decade-long story.

"By far this is the most challenging thing I've ever been a part of, this movie," Abrams freely admits. "For a lot of reasons. Story reasons, expectation reasons, dealing with the characters, what's come before, but this trilogy of movies was always a continuation of this saga… all the set ups for what happens in this movie are right there in *I* through *VIII*, many of them in *I* through *VI*. So we didn't try to reinvent everything. Obviously we're using some of the characters, we're using a lot of the themes, but these themes must be revisited in new ways. It's not to say we want to do the same stuff." He adds that "if you watch all nine of these movies together, there's an absolute continuum".

Finding the right way to end the story was one thing, but walking away from the trilogy

WHAT DOES 'THE RISE OF SKYWALKER' MEAN?

Just who – or what? – is the 'Skywalker' that's rising in this film? Here are all the possible options:

LEIA
She may have taken the surname of her adoptive father, but Leia is a Skywalker by blood. The title could refer to her, and to the way the Resistance rises under her leadership.

KYLO REN
As Leia's son, Kylo Ren is the other Skywalker still knocking around. The title could refer to his rise to evil power – or possibly hint at a redemption arc.

LUKE
He's dead, but, to paraphrase Obi Wan, striking Luke down will only make him – and the ideals he stood for – even more powerful.

REY
She's Luke's apprentice, and also views Leia as a mentor. Rey is, in many ways, the character who is taking the Skywalker name and ethos onwards – even if her parents were nobodies.

A NEW JEDI ORDER
Luke and Yoda burnt the Jedi teachings, so will *Episode IX* see a new Jedi order rise, one that takes its less rigid rules, and maybe its name, from the legendary Luke Skywalker?



was quite another challenge for the cast who have been playing these characters for up to four decades. Ridley has warned her family that she'll "be a mess at Christmas" once the press tour for *The Rise Of Skywalker* is finished and she can truly accept that the trilogy has come to an end. "I was 21 when this all started, so I don't think anyone ever really listens to a 21-year-old. But to be always made to feel like what you have to say matters in a work environment, fully sets the precedent for always. So, personally, I've had an amazing time," she says.

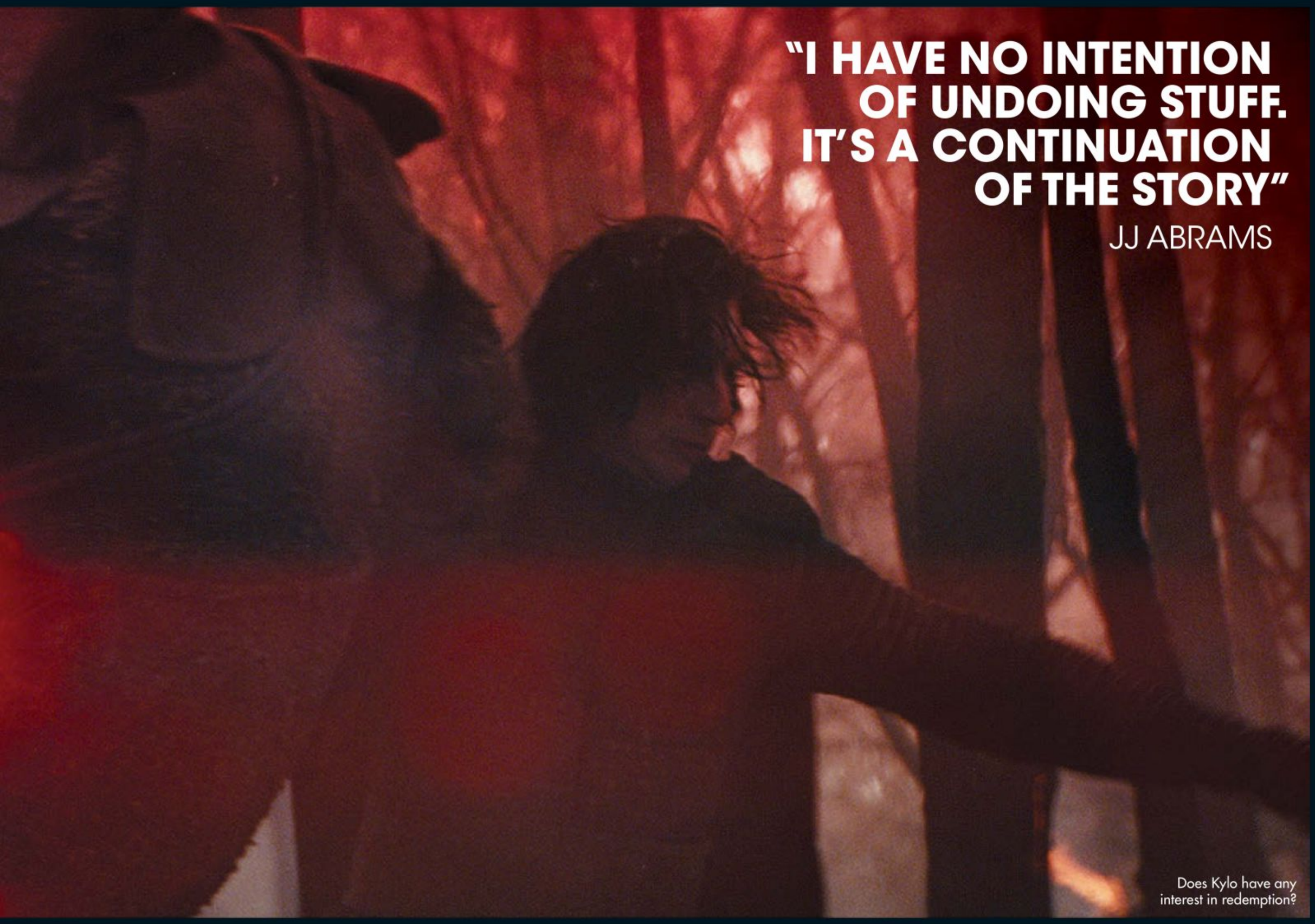
Boyega tells us that the shoot became especially emotional as it neared the end and cast members started "dropping like flies", saying he was "shattered" when it came to his turn to say goodbye. There was a tradition on set that whenever an actor wrapped their final shot, Abrams gave a speech, the actor gave a speech, and a celebration was held. Ridley confesses to crying so much that she doesn't remember what she said in her speech. Isaac, appropriately, filmed his final shots in the Millennium Falcon, and he says it was "very emotional and everyone started clapping saying it was Oscar's last day, I said a few words and I was going to say more and then JJ interrupted and was like 'okay, but it's also Anthony Daniels' last day and that's a little more important'. I got upstaged by C-3PO," Isaac laughs.

Despite being sad that the series is drawing to a close, the actors all feel ready to move on. Ridley is keen to enjoy further *Star Wars* projects as a fan ("*The Mandalorian* looks badass!") and Boyega says that the cast call *Star Wars* "a luxury prison, sometimes, because it's great, you love it, but it's a huge chunk of the year," and hinders them from taking on other projects. He, for example, is eager to work with directors like Jordan Peele, and spend more time with his family. Isaac tells us that he has loved being part of the community of *Star Wars*, but is keen to step away from the glare of scrutiny that it brings with it. "It's a massive chapter of my life, these last five years. The unknown nature of it, being a part of something so big, there's a lot of introspection. It can make you feel self-conscious as well, because there are so many eyes, constantly, not knowing what is going to happen in the next chapters, and you've signed up for years but you don't know where it's going to go, or if what you're doing now is going to affect what's going to happen later."

Isaac is going to have to cope with those eyes on him for a few more weeks, as fans feverishly await the conclusion to the saga. Abrams and the cast know that not everyone will love the ending – they never do – but they are proud of it. Naomi Ackie, one of the newest additions to the cast, possibly has the closest you can get to an objective view of this latest trilogy, and how Abrams and co tie it up. "I've come in at the end, so I think, knowing the story anyway, I was blown away by the ending," she says. "It's what I would have wanted to see, personally. I think it's definitely crossing the line, it's not predictable and it challenges you and makes you question some of the characters' motives, everyone has real personal stakes in this film that goes beyond the dynamics and our relationships. This is bigger than all of us. It was amazing actually."

Star Wars certainly is bigger than the individuals involved in *The Rise Of Skywalker*, and indeed is bigger than the film itself. *Star Wars* is a machine, a universe, an actual religion. Wherever *The Rise Of Skywalker* takes us, you can guarantee it won't be the last we hear from this world.

Star Wars Episode IX: The Rise Of Skywalker is released on 19 December.



Does Kylo have any interest in redemption?





Here Be Monsters

One of the biggest fantasy franchises finally comes to TV as The Witcher slices into Netflix. We talk to showrunner Lauren Schmidt Hissrich and star Freya Allan about monsters, magic, horror and real-world parallels

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

***The Witcher* doesn't really have casual fans. Whether you're a devotee of Andrzej Sapkowski's books or obsessed with the videogames, if this is a world that you know, then you've spent months, rather than hours, at a time in it.**

This is a world of monsters, both human and not, filled with darkness and light, blood and wit, and drama that compels you to stick around. It's a world that reaches out and grabs you by the throat, demanding your attention. For Lauren Schmidt Hissrich, bringing *The Witcher* to Netflix has been a passion project years in the making and the end is finally in sight.

"It feels amazing," grins showrunner Lauren Schmidt Hissrich when we catch up with her in a rare quiet moment before a panel on the show's promotional tour. "I've been working on the show since September 2017, so a very long time! It's hard to believe we're actually up to the point where the world will see this show in a couple of short months, and I'm really ready for everyone to see it. I'm really excited about it, I think it's great, and I'm ready for the world to be on the journey with me and also glad that I won't have to keep so many secrets!"

Secrets are definitely being kept under lock and key for the moment but, for the uninitiated, *The Witcher* follows Geralt Of Rivia (Henry Cavill), the titular monster hunter who dispatches nightmare creatures in exchange for a hefty bounty. He may travel alone but his skills are in demand from the highest corridors of power to the lowliest backwoods inn, so saying "his name precedes him" is putting it lightly. Things will get complicated for our solitary hero when he enters the orbit of Yennefer (Anya Chalotra), a powerful sorceress with a dark past, and Ciri (Freya Allan), a young princess with a secret who has one hell of a journey ahead of her.

"So many things," laughs Schmidt Hissrich when we ask what it was about the stories that first grabbed her attention. "The first is that for a fantasy *The Witcher* isn't completely earnest. It's not all about big battles and big hunts and big fights and dynasties rising and falling. There are elements of that but what I found most appealing about the books is the human stories that are being told. The relationships between characters, specifically Geralt, Yennefer and Ciri. I've always said the story I was interested in telling was a broken family coming together, and then a broken family falling back apart again. As people do."

"I would say the escapism of it is a massive thing," adds Freya Allan, who stars as Ciri. "There's amazing scenery, it's such a colourful continent, there's so many cool places, there's so many elements to it, it's got monsters, it's got magic, it's got a lot of adventure, it's got fighting, it has all those brilliant fantastical elements but then it also has some very real themes within it as well: loss, longing for family, discovery, lots of things that will relate to the normal world as well. I think there is something for everybody really, and that's probably why a lot of people are addicted to it and there's so much in there to be addicted to."

With so much of Sapkowski's source material to work from (eight novels and short story collections at the last count), Schmidt Hissrich tells us that the intention was



Geralt leads a very solitary existence.

always to stick the novels rather than the videogames. "The first source material that I went to was *The Last Wish*, the first book in the series," she explains. "It's a book of short stories that aren't narratively woven together in any way, and I just feel like that book sets up the Continent. It really gives a sense of the environment; the people in it, the politics in it and of course what Witchers are and their role in this complicated world.

"So I went through and with the writers picked out not just my favourite stories, although I did pick some of my favourites, but the stories that I thought best illustrated what *The Witcher* is about," she continues. "And that's kind of where we start off. Geralt is almost 100 years old when the series starts and we find him in the middle of a journey. Then there's the death of a character and that's what launches him off onto his journey and that starts to complicate things for a man who thought he'd had it all figured out. It's a pretty fun place to start, it's really a character on the edge of a new journey."

While Geralt is the introduction to the story ("obviously the show is called *The Witcher*, Geralt is our Witcher," laughs Schmidt Hissrich), it's been clear from the very first promotional materials that this series would be a three-hander with Ciri and Yennefer very much on their own journeys as well.

"The biggest shift that I've made from the books is I wanted Ciri and Yennefer to stand on their own legs a little bit more," Schmidt Hissrich explains. "In the books they're introduced to us through Geralt's lens, through his POV, and it was important to me that our audience get to know them individually first, see them be created and their own journeys and then see them intersect and see what happens. So that was one of the biggest shifts that I made but it was, to me, the most exciting opportunity because I also found these female characters to be really compelling."

For Allan, the fact that we see Ciri on the path towards the character we know and love, as opposed to being presented to the audience fully formed, was a huge part of the appeal. "What I loved and I could see straight away even from the audition process is that she'd been written realistically," she enthuses. "Nowadays we're seeing a lot of very strong female characters who are really badass and that's brilliant. Obviously Ciri is renowned for being a badass character but what I loved about the way that they'd portrayed it in the writing is that it's not like she's just born and she's this amazing badass female character. You do see her be very vulnerable and cry and go through suffering and experience loss, and at times be a little bit pathetic because she's had no experience of certain things. And that jumped out at me, that they were portraying it realistically. You need somewhere for the character to grow and you need a reason for why she becomes more confident, more badass. You do see that she's very strong through her vulnerability. The fact that she's so vulnerable and she's suffering and yet she continues on and that, to me, is bravery. She doesn't have to be totally cold and totally stern and be violent and be killing people. It's a different kind of strength which I really like."

While so much of the story is being kept under wraps, it's very exciting to see that the series will operate in many ways as an origin story for one of *The Witcher's* best characters, the third part of *The Witcher's* complicated family: the sorceress Yennefer. "Yennefer is one of my favourites from the books because when we meet Yennefer in the books she is a very experienced, very powerful sorceress," enthuses Schmidt Hissrich. "And you hear bits and pieces about her past, you're usually told in an offhand remark: 'Here's something that happened to me as a kid.' So one of the things that I did very early on, I went through all of the books and I found all of her recollections about her past and then we crafted a story in the writers' room that allowed us to be with Yennefer when she was actually just a child, when she is becoming the person that we







Cavill trained hard to bring Geralt to life.

Fierce fans

Lauren Schmidt Hissrich on why she doesn't fear the fan base

When you're adapting anything, you're going to get some pushback from the fan base. Whether it's based on a book, game or old film, every property has the die-hards who know exactly what it should be and no adaptation will ever match that vision exactly. One of the great things about watching *The Witcher* come together has been seeing just how open Schmidt Hissrich has been about the process and how willing she is to engage with the fans.

"I love interacting with fans; probably a bit too much for everyone's taste around here!" she laughs. "There's nothing more that I love than getting on Twitter and talking directly to the fan base. To me, I really wanted to access their enthusiasm and their excitement for this. I think a lot of people see really rabid fan bases as enemies and in fact I think that these are people who love *The Witcher*, these are the people who I really want to take their enthusiasm and grow their enthusiasm and learn from their enthusiasm. I don't find it daunting at all frankly, I find it really exciting.

"As a creator of a show what more could you ask for than people who are excited to see it? Do I think that they're going to see some shifts and some changes? Yes. Do I think that they're going to like them? I do. Because we're also approaching this as fans of the series and when I say 'we' I mean the writers, the cast, the crew, production, Netflix, we all love the franchise as well so we definitely operate from a fan base ourselves."



"THE STORY I WAS INTERESTED IN TELLING WAS A BROKEN FAMILY COMING TOGETHER"

LAUREN SCHMIDT HISSRICH





This was a massive international production.

All in the game

Upcoming videogame adaptations you need to know about…

MORTAL KOMBAT

Put aside those nostalgic memories of the fun but kind of terrible 1995 movie and Christopher Lambert. James Wan is producing the new take on the classic arcade fighting game and we've been promised an R-rating and faithful fatalities. *Supergirl's* Mehcad Brooks is Jax, Hiroyuki Sanada is Scorpion and the brilliant Tadanobu Asano is Raiden.

TOMB RAIDER 2

We were hoping that Alicia Vikander would get to play Lara Croft again after 2018's very solid and surprisingly fun reboot, so we're delighted that none other than Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump are on board to direct and write her next adventure. With the reset fully accomplished, hopefully there'll be a bit more actual tomb raiding this time.

HALO

After years of failed attempts to turn it into a movie, Showtime has finally grabbed the bull by the horns and Master Chief will be coming to TV in the form of *American Gods'* Pablo Schreiber. The nine episode series features a strong cast, including Natasha McElhone and Bokeem Woodbine, but we won't get to see it until at least the start of 2021.

RESIDENT EVIL

47 Metres Down and *The Strangers: Prey At Night* director Johannes Roberts is the man in charge of bringing *Resident Evil* back to the big screen after Milla Jovovich and Paul WS Anderson finally bowed out. James Wan was briefly attached to produce but has moved on, but Roberts is saying all the right things about making it a scary horror again.

MONSTER HUNTER

Paul WS Anderson and Milla Jovovich couldn't stay away from videogame movies for long, though. Filming on the story of a team of UN soldiers who fall into an alternate monster-filled world wrapped back in December 2018 and we're still a ways off the September 2020 release date. Still: Tony Jaa is in it.

THE DIVISION

We were starting to worry about this adaptation of the Ubisoft game but it looks like it's finally all systems go, with *Deadpool 2's* David Leitch on board to direct Jake Gyllenhaal and Jessica Chastain in the story of a team of operatives activated after a pandemic decimates New York. The project was snapped up by Netflix but there's no release date yet.

know and love and see in the books. So she starts off in a very vulnerable place, she's a character that has experienced a great deal of pain in her life and then we get to see how she transcends that pain and grows from it and strengthens her resolve in this world, and I think it's a really great origin for her."

And, as fans will tell you, this is a world in which strength and resolve are required, as the vast Continent is filled with murderers, monsters, supernatural beings and good old-fashioned cutthroats. The sheer scale of Sapkowski's creation is vast and potentially very imposing, but Schmidt Hissrich is quick to downplay any concerns about accessibility for new audiences.

"I think that most fantasy is accessible," she demurs. "Fantasy has gotten a bad rap for being something that people feel like: 'Oh, I don't know how to connect to it because it's about elves or it's about magic or whatever it is.' But most fantasy shows are just an allegory for our real world. It's been told hopefully in a more entertaining way that doesn't make you feel like you're being constantly beaten about the head with politics lessons. Instead you just get to sit back and be entertained and enjoy the story, and I think when you look hard enough all fantasy embraces modern themes. Societal themes, political themes, we talk a lot in *The Witcher* writer's room about racism and xenophobia and sexism and equality of genders and equality in the workplace. We talk about a lot of things, and they're things that are all kind of central to the show.

"The cool thing I think is what we like to do is turn expectations on their head," she continues. "So, sometimes you'll think: 'Oh, obviously I know how this show is going to approach this issue,' but I hope that we approach it in a completely different way and make people on both sides of any debate question why they're on that side and perhaps empathise with people on the other side. No one wants to sit down after a hard day at work and watch depressing political morass. But what we get to do is present those themes in an entertaining way and I think hopefully make people question their beliefs or at least look at what's happening outside their beliefs."

These themes directly affect Geralt, a character who's been beaten into a position of misanthropy and distrust by a lifetime's worth of experience and who will have to challenge those beliefs on this new journey. They're also crucial for the young Princess Ciri, as Allan explains: "She has been sheltered from what the real world is. So a massive thing for her journey is that she meets people and she realises that they might have completely opposing views to her and yet she can still see that doesn't mean they're an awful person, they just have that viewpoint and that's why they think that. Because of where they've been standing they believe something different. She puts herself in other people's shoes throughout the season because she's constantly meeting new people."


Geralt doesn't have the highest opinion of humanity.

"IF GERALT IS FIGHTING A MONSTER I WOULD RATHER HAVE HIM FIGHTING SOMETHING REAL... YES, WE DEFINITELY LEAN INTO HORROR A LOT!"

LAUREN SCHMIDT HISSRICH

Of course, we wouldn't be doing our due diligence if we didn't turn the conversation from people and loftier themes to one of the most exciting elements of *The Witcher* world: the monsters. We've had glimpses here and there in the teasers and promotional images, but the deadly, horrifying beasts are something that sets *The Witcher* apart from a lot of epic fantasy and Schmidt Hissrich tells us that she was determined to use good old fashioned techniques wherever she could.

"Absolutely," she enthuses. "What we tried to do is keep our world as grounded as possible. Obviously these are monsters that don't exist in the real world so we did use a lot of prosthetics and we tried to keep things performance-based, to use an actor in a prosthetic as opposed to a whole CG creation. If Geralt is fighting a monster I would rather have him fighting something real than fighting a big empty space in front of a greenscreen. Obviously there is CGI in the show but we really did use as many authentic environments as we could. We shot in an amazing castle in Poland, we did the same in Austria and then obviously most of our soundstages were in Hungary so we shot the bulk of the series there on soundstages and in the surrounding countryside."

The massive international production is indicative of the faith that Netflix has in the show (it's also telling that it decided to invest in a series rather than a movie, as originally planned). However, the freedom isn't just in terms of the budget. It's also about the kind of story that they can tell.

"Yes, we definitely lean into horror a lot," grins Schmidt Hissrich. "What I will say about being on Netflix is that there is a great freedom that comes with being able to say almost anything and show almost anything. But I think that as creators and as storytellers we have a deep responsibility to our audience to make sure that we're only saying things and seeing things if they are good for story, if they move plot forward or if they move character forward. I mean, audiences are really savvy now, there's a lot on television and on streaming services that they can see and I don't know that they want to be shocked anymore. I think that they would see through that ploy and they want really good stories. So if the stories involve violence or blood or nudity or sex, great, but I'm not going to have it happening in the background just for fun. I think that as creators we have a responsibility to our audience to make sure that we're not just trying to shock them. We're trying to make sure that they're buying a good story."

The Witcher launches on Netflix on 20 December.

SPIRITS FROM ACROSS THE SEA

MATI DIOP TELLS US ABOUT HER STUNNING DEBUT FEATURE ATLANTICS AND THE FREEDOM OF GENRE

WORDS **ELENA LAZIC**

Mati Diop's *Atlantics*, a haunting ghost story about young men who, after dying at sea in Dakar, return as zombies to haunt their loved ones, is a lot like the blazing sun that regularly engulfs the screen in her film: triumphant, beguiling and just a little but ominous; a fierce ball of fire moving with the cool resolve usually found in directors who already have a long career behind them.

To be sure, Mati Diop isn't actually new on the scene at all: perhaps better known as an actress, she has appeared in films by Claire Denis – a very clear influence on her own work – and Antonio Campos, but Diop has also directed a series of well-received short films in the last ten years too. One of them was *Atlantique*, the starting point of this new film, her very first feature.

But *Atlantics* is the work of a strikingly perceptive, ambitious filmmaker with great control of her craft, and perhaps we should have predicted that Diop herself would bring the same curiosity, passion and strength to our interview with her.

When we ask Diop about how her film embraces genre cinema in a way that none of her previous work did, she answers with another question: "What is genre cinema to you?" We eventually agree that genre cinema is hard to define — though, according to Diop, this might be by definition. "When I started to look at the definition of a genre film," she explains, "I could recognise myself in the fact that it is a genre that is a bit on the side, not very well regarded, not really understood, and one that can be confusing."

As the daughter of a French mother and a Senegalese father, and the first black woman with a film in competition at the Cannes Film Festival, Diop could indeed describe herself as a misfit. She tells us that this could be why she does not see hierarchies between "the great classics of cinema, the Nouvelle Vague, and the American Sunday evening films on television". She cites Jerry Zucker's *Ghost* and John Carpenter's *The Fog* as two key inspirations for the love story in *Atlantics*, which follows a young woman who, after initially being at a loss about the sudden disappearance of her lover, eventually finds herself transformed by her relationship with his spirit – a lot like Demi Moore in *Ghost*.

"I think that genre cinema implies a rapport to cinema that is much freer and much less regulated," Diop says. "Maybe if our conversation begins with 'what is a genre film?', it means that the question is possible and that, therefore, so is reinvention."

But Diop insists that she didn't make a genre film just because she loves this type of movie: "It came from an atmosphere I felt emanating from Dakar at a time when a lot of young people were going out to sea." She mentions striking conversations she had with young men just like the character of the lover in the film, boys who were about to leave the country on makeshift boats looking for a better life abroad. "I felt my relation to the ocean beginning to change," Diop adds, "it became charged with a mythological or mystical dimension."

"I COULD RECOGNISE MYSELF IN THE FACT THAT IT IS A GENRE THAT IS A BIT ON THE SIDE, NOT REALLY UNDERSTOOD"

MATI DIOP

Diop worked with cinematographer Claire Mathon (who also worked on Celine Sciamma's *Portrait Of A Lady On Fire* this year) on bringing to the screen this eerie atmosphere, in what she describes as a true collaboration. "I don't choose the cinematographer for them to give me an image," she explains, "I've often created the look of my films myself, and I have a recognisable, strongly asserted visual style."

What Mathon did bring to the film was her adaptability. "Claire has worked on both documentary films – which require great responsiveness – and on films with very strong aesthetic ambitions," Diop tells us. It's a winning combination in *Atlantics*, which successfully captures the raw energy of its non-professional cast without ever letting go of Diop's poetic and almost surreally beautiful visual style.

When we ask Diop about the role of beauty in her film, her answer once again nullifies our question: "It's difficult for me to talk about the image of the film, because it's my first language," she tells me. "Before being a director or an author, I'm a filmmaker. The frame really is an extension of the gaze I have on things."

This eye for beauty is evident in the dazzling shots of the sun over the ocean, but also in the film's less obviously stylised compositions. It is interesting, then, to hear Diop candidly talk about the collision between this vision, and the concrete realities of filmmaking: "When you have spent three years writing a film, when you have dreamed about a scene, having to shoot it in just three hours is really painful," she says to us. "All of a sudden, the scene is subjected to very trivial things. But it's also thrilling, because it's happening in reality, and you have to find a way."

Diop's genuine interest in real life and in people shines through the hypnotic performances that she drew from her non-professional actors. "A lot of their own real selves imbue the characters. It is them I am filming, and what they bring to the film is simply everything," she says.

Her favourite part of making a film is the casting and location scouting: "When you're in movement and on the ground… You're very much in contact with the world, it's not like writing at the laptop for three years." But do not think she is getting soft – another reason why she prefers that part of the process is because it allows precisely for the experimentation and freedom that she misses during filming: "It's this in-between space where everything is still possible."

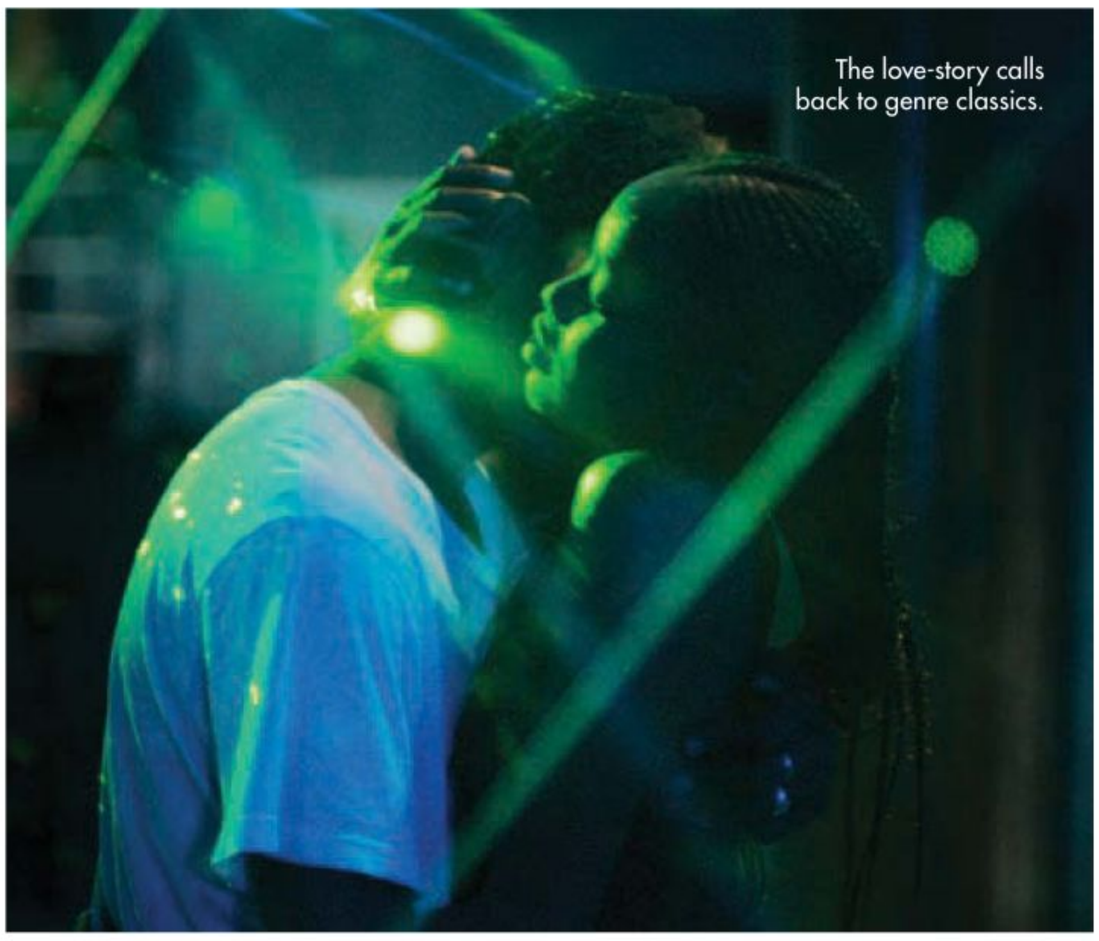
Yet for all its difficulties, filmmaking is something Diop appears eager to return to. "What is really exciting," she says, "is that everything you didn't manage to do in your first feature is why you want to make a second one." We can only hope her next effort will bring another occasion to discuss genre, its limits and definitions.

Atlantics is in cinemas and streaming on Netflix on 29 November.



The film features a non-professional cast.





The love-story calls back to genre classics.



Young men die at sea only to return home.

THE GREAT WAR (OF THE WORLDS)

THE BBC IS BRINGING HG WELLS' TRIPODS TO THE SMALL SCREEN IN A THREE-PART MINISERIES. WE TALK TO THE SHOW'S WRITER AND DIRECTOR ABOUT FAITHFULLY ADAPTING THE BOOK

WORDS **ABIGAIL CHANDLER**
INTERVIEWS **ABIGAIL CHANDLER , JONATHAN HATFULL**

Without HG Wells' *The War Of The Worlds*, science-fiction could have taken a very different turn. But instead, his story of Martians stomping all over Victorian Britain in their terrifying tripods and firing heat-rays at people became the prototypical alien invasion story. It's strange, then, that his seminal novel is rarely adapted faithfully, and set in the era in which Wells was writing. Most versions, including Orson Welles' famous radio adaptation in 1938, the 1953 movie and Steven Spielberg's 2005 adaptation, have been updated to their respective present days. "[I]t's probably always a little bit more interesting to work out how an alien invasion would impact on what society's currently going through," muses *Doctor Who's* Peter Harness, writer of the BBC's new period adaptation of *The War Of The Worlds*. "I think nowadays we're a little more used to genre collisions, so it's a little easier to get away with doing a sci-fi period thing in a way that maybe it hasn't been in the past."

But while this take on *The War Of The Worlds* is a period adaptation, it's not the exact period Wells' book was set in. That was published in 1897, in the late Victorian period, whereas this new version is set in the Edwardian era, a few years later. "We wanted there to be a slightly different shift in the political onus," director Craig Viveiros *(And Then There Were None)* explains, regarding the slight shift into the Edwardian era. "After Victoria died there was more of a liberated movement, the suffragette movement was happening, also at the time it was the period of industrial revolution which of course is what it's all nodding to."

Harness adds that "that period of British history is very interesting for me, because it's basically the Empire at its peak, [but] at the turn of the 20th century you could already see the fracture lines and how this big, hubristic, imperial project was going to crack, and that arguably is what we're dealing with 130 years later." He says that the miniseries plays around with "notions

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

The Great War (Of The Worlds)





The series fleshes out the book's characters.







of what it is to be British, what being 'Britain' means, and what happens when wars are fought against enemies who don't have the kind of firepower or technological advancement that you do". Harness promptly laughs at his own seriousness so soon into our conversation, and assures us that the series is also about tripods and "bombs blowing things up".

The miniseries centres on George (Rafe Spall), a journalist, and Amy (Eleanor Tomlinson), an avid amateur scientist and astronomer, who are living together under the glare of scandal, following George's separation from his wealthy and well-connected wife. This is an invention of Harness', as the book is famously vague when it comes to its characters. The narrator – upon whom George is based – remains unnamed for the duration of the book, and his wife barely features. Other key characters – like the Curate and the Artilleryman – remain anonymous throughout. Only the astronomer Ogilvy, here played by Robert Carlyle, gets a name. One of Harness' first jobs was to flesh out the book's characters, and invent some new ones.

"The book is done as a bit of reportage really, meaning that it's not strictly necessary to get to know the character and for them to have much of an emotional arc," he explains. "But it's a big ask to spend three hours of telly following somebody's exploits for you not to know about them. So obviously there has to be some emotional hook."

In order to find that hook, he turned to Wells' own personal life. 'George' is Wells' own name, and Amy was the name of his second wife, following a similarly scandalous divorce from his first wife. "I just took somebody who could have been HG Wells and plopped him back into his own story, really," Harness says.

Director Viveiros praises the two leads, saying that "they really shone and had such brilliant chemistry on set", and that "they had to have this really very atypical relationship, really, at that time, where Amy is a character who wants to stride forth and she's actually the stronger of the two characters".

Harness, in particular, is still "amazed that Robert Carlyle did it. You would have thought that he would just go for the lead in anything, but I think he rather liked Ogilvy, for some reason, which is rather flattering, and it's immensely flattering that Rafe Spall and Eleanor did this as well, and Rupert Graves," who plays George's brother.

But while the characters bring the heart and the hook to the series, they're not what *The War Of The Worlds* is known for: that honour would go to the Martians. The book is packed full of memorable images, and the makers of the show wanted to do the alien menace justice. "Wells tended to describe things in quite a steampunky way…" Harness says, "he describes the tripods as something like boilers or water engines on stilts… so it's all seen through that industrialised mirror. And I think if you want to do that then that does make it seem dated and a little bit quaint. And I think you could do that successfully. But I thought I'd rather see something that looked like technology that we still probably can't quite imagine."

So while the tripods retain their classic silhouette, the design has been modernised. "In the industrial revolution at that time," Viveiros says, "the idea of future technology, which was kind of like mechanised industry, was the fear. Now, today, it's a different type of technology, it's nanotechnology, it's information technology, it's AI." That inspired him and his concept artists to design an "exoskeleton, this fabric around the tripod" which could indicate where the Martian technology diverged from ours. He took inspiration from the "bark of an old maritime pine I saw in a garden back in Lisbon. I saw that it just had these different layers of texture and aging, textures in some way calcified but also extremely unique and something that could be fused with nature."

The production design team had quite a challenge on *The War Of The Worlds*, creating both the look of the aliens, and a believable Edwardian world in which to set all the chaos and destruction in. Harness tells us that they were unable to film in the places where the book actually took place – and where Wells himself lived – as the area has changed too much in the intervening century. However, the team found

A timeline of war

1897
HG Wells' *The War Of The Worlds* begins its serialisation in *Pearson's Magazine*.

1898
Wells' full book is published in its complete form.



1938
Orson Welles' radio adaptation causes some Americans to believe that an alien invasion has actually happened.

1950
The BBC's first radio adaptation of the book.



1953
The first big-screen adaptation of the book, directed by Byron Haskin.



1978
Jeff Wayne releases his musical version of *The War Of The Worlds*, a rock opera.

"IT'S NOT THE TOM CRUISE VERSION, IT'S QUITE A CONSIDERED TAKE ON LOVING AND LOSS AND TRAUMA"

CRAIG VIVEIROS

that "Liverpool has got a lot of beautiful looking Edwardian and Georgian places, and there are a few terraces of houses which are in the midst of falling down or being demolished, which you can dress up, and then destroy again."

It was important, especially to Viveiros, that a lot of the destruction you see on screen is achieved via practical effects, rather than relying on digital effects. "I think it's always the best way to have real elements in front of you that you can play with," he says, adding that the final product was a "real merger of the two".

Harness points out that doing a big show like *The War Of The Worlds* is always challenging when you "don't have £15 million per episode to spend on it. You have to keep your powder dry for the things that matter and make an impact".

But an effective sci-fi thriller doesn't necessarily need to cost a fortune – there are other ways to build tension. Harness talks about using sound and creating emotional stakes, while Viveiros tells us not to necessarily expect wall-to-wall action. "It's not the Tom Cruise version, you know, and don't get me wrong I love that movie, but it's not running away from tripods and the whole world's blowing up around you," Viveiros says. "It's quite a considered take on loving and loss and also in some ways trauma because it talks about how the Martians are essentially an invading force, they are like British colonialists going to Africa and suddenly deciding they want to take this nation and all its resources."

Harness and Viveiros also want to be faithful to Wells' themes, including his thoughts on colonialism, PTSD, war, and fears about the rapid advancement of technology. Viveiros adds that he sees an environmental message in Wells' work too, one that is especially relevant today, which is "about responsibility as a species, as a civilisation... Do you want to preserve [your world] or do you want to carry on consuming and turn the whole thing to dust?"

So, while this may not offer up Spielberg-levels of big-budget action, that's okay, because that was never really the point of the source material to begin with. Viveiros tells us that this adaptation "still has the action, the drama, the high notes like that but I think also there's a deeper connection to some of the characters, and first and foremost it is actually a character drama love story with the sci-fi and horror to just help." And the tripods. Let's not forget them.

The War Of The Worlds will air this autumn on BBC One.





This is an epic undertaking for the production team.

Spoiler warning

Peter Harness had a big problem when it came to adapting *The War Of The Worlds*: its famous ending. If you don't know the ending look away now.

"I think, considering germs were quite a new idea when [Wells] wrote it, the idea that the Martians get killed off by our germs is brilliant. [But] it's not very dramatic." He says that there's "nothing cosy about" the original book, so he didn't want to go for a cosy ending where the aliens catch a cold and decide to leave Earth alone, and the British Empire continues to thrive. "I was keen that it would have a more lasting effect, and a much more lasting effect on history. So I think that's my big invention," he says, while also stating his intention to stay true to the book and "keep all those beats but give them not necessarily in the way people are expecting them". He also intends to correct what he sees as an oversight on Wells' part: "What he lets go of is the red weed," Harness says, explaining that, to him, the red weed is the Martians' attempt at terraforming Earth, so that's something we can expect to see more of in this version.

1979
An arcade game by Cinematronics becomes the first videogame adaptation of *The War Of The Worlds.*

1988
The first TV adaptation of the book, although really it was a sequel to the 1953 film. It lasted two seasons.



2002
The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol 2 features Wells' Martians as the main antagonist.



2005
Steven Spielberg's adaptation of the book, starring Tom Cruise.

2019
The BBC's three-part miniseries, *The War Of The Worlds*, airs.



2019
Fox and Studio Canal's *War Of The Worlds* TV adaptation, set in modern day Europe.

"ONLY SCIENCE FICTION CAN HAVE SUCH A GENEROUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE END OF THE WORLD"

CIXIN LIU, AUTHOR OF THE THREE BODY PROBLEM AND THE WANDERING EARTH, SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY TO SCIFINOW

WORDS **JOHN BLEASDALE**

CIXIN LIU is not only the most important author of science fiction in China but is quickly becoming the most original SF writer internationally. His epic trilogy *The Three Body Problem* (AKA *Remembrance Of Earth's Past*) became a worldwide bestseller and the movie adaptation of his novella *The Wandering Earth* smashed box office records in China, before landing on Netflix.

WHAT FIRST GOT YOU INTO SCIENCE FICTION?

The first science fiction I read was Jules Verne's *Journey To The Center Of The Earth*. The first writer I was excited about was Arthur C Clarke, whose *2001: Space Odyssey* inspired me to write science fiction.

ARE THERE ANY CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS WHO INFLUENCE YOU?

Frankly, no. Science fiction has shown obvious signs of decline, gradually losing vitality. I never read anything really exciting among contemporary works.

HOW DO YOU THINK CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION DIFFERS FROM WESTERN SF?

This is the question I am most frequently asked when I'm abroad, but it's difficult to answer, because Chinese science fiction is a colourful existence with different styles and it's difficult to summarise in a single sentence. Different writers give you different feelings. Some are very similar to Western SF, while others are very Chinese.

However, science fiction is 100% imported for China. There's no science fiction in traditional Chinese culture, so we are greatly influenced by the west. As a result, the similarities far outweigh the differences. As for differences, the most obvious difference is: Western SF has a strong Christian background, while Chinese SF doesn't. So, themes considered very significant in western SF – human cloning and the creation of life – are less important for us. In addition, due to our different stages of social development, we have different focusses. While in the west, science fiction focusses on gender and race, feminism, dystopia and other themes, Chinese SF pays more attention to the survival and development of human beings shaped by technology.

ARE YOU SURPRISED THAT YOUR WORK IS NOW READ INTERNATIONALLY?

It does surprise me because my writing is almost 100% aimed at Chinese readers. I didn't expect to have such a large audience in the west. But when you think about it, it's not surprising because science fiction is one of the genres that can most easily find resonance across countries and cultures. In science fiction, the estrangement between races and countries is not important. The crisis and problems are faced by all humankind. This is the most precious quality of SF. At the same time, for a rapidly developing country, science fiction is the first genre which gets noticed by the rest of the world. This is true for the UK two centuries ago and the US a century ago. China is a fast-changing and futuristic country, and it is not surprising that Chinese science fiction has a lot of western readers.

YOUR SCIENCE FICTION WORKS ON ALMOST UNIMAGINABLE SCALES. HOW DO YOU BALANCE SUCH IMMENSITY WITH THE MORE INTIMATE AND HUMAN?

The advantage of science fiction over other forms of literature is that you can write on astronomical scales. As for how to balance the astronomical scale of the universe and the trivial daily life, this is what I have been trying to do. To describe the direct relationship between small human individuals and the immense universe. Beware: it's direct, not indirect. It's not that I look up into the sky and get inspirations about life, but the direct connection between the universe and humans. Admittedly, this is difficult and it's one of the highest goals I pursue in writing science fiction.

IN THE THREE BODY PROBLEM YOU BEGIN DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. ONE CHARACTER CONCLUDES THAT HUMANITY IS NOT WORTH SAVING. IS THIS PESSIMISM SOMETHING YOU YOURSELF HAVE FELT?

Events like the Cultural Revolution in the novel really make the heroine dismayed with human nature. But for me, although I personally experienced the Cultural Revolution, I think human civilisation, though it has its dark side, is a great existence in the universe.





WHERE TO START WITH CIXIN LIU

A handy primer for a modern SF great

The Three Body Problem is the opening of the trilogy that bears the same name, also known as *Remembrance Of Earth's Past*. It's definitely a natural place to start, though the novels get better and better, and certainly the scale becomes mind-shattering. A mysterious game reveals the possibility that an alien civilisation is monitoring human activity, perhaps with the aid of a subversive group.

The Wandering Earth is a collection of Cixin Liu's shorter works and gives a far more varied view of the breadth of his vision and talent. There's hilarious satire, child-like fables, intriguing thought experiments, alien visitations and apocalyptic scenarios. The last is best illustrated by the eponymous novella about a mission to turn the earth into an interstellar space ship to evade the explosion of the sun.

Ball Lightning is the most recently translated work, though it was originally written over a decade ago. When a boy's parents are incinerated by a ball of lightning he becomes obsessed with the phenomenon and his studies lead him to open a new frontier in particle physics. A novel of ideas and discovery as well as ethics. The weaponisation of science is also a topic in this weird and wonderful deep dive into strange weather.

INTERVIEW

Cixin Liu



"IT IS BEING RESPONSIBLE TO TAKE THE WORST POSSIBLE SCENARIO INTO ACCOUNT WHEN IT COMES TO THE FATE OF CIVILISATION"

CIXIN LIU

EXISTENTIAL THREATS FUEL THE NEED FOR COOPERATION IN YOUR NOVELS. IS THE THREAT OF ALIEN INVASION SIMILAR TO THE THREATS POSED BY NUCLEAR WAR? IS EXTRATERRESTRIAL CONTACT LIKELY?

If there is an invasion of an alien civilisation, it will be the most significant event that human civilisation has ever faced. Its impacts on human beings are far more serious than the threat of nuclear wars between humans. In fact, the mere knowledge of alien civilisations would have a profound impact on human culture, politics and philosophy. As a science fiction writer, I will list all kinds of possibilities when we encounter aliens. And my stories just consider one of the worst possible outcomes. But it is just being responsible to take the worst-case scenario into account when it comes to the fate of human civilisation.

IN YOUR STORIES, PEOPLE ARE HOPELESS IN THE FACE OF THE UNIVERSE AND YET SOME INDIVIDUALS MAKE DECISIONS THAT HAVE HUGE REPERCUSSIONS ON HISTORY.

Let me answer this by quoting a paragraph from *Dark Forest*: 'This is a question that cannot be proved true or falsified unless time starts over and we kill some great people and see how history goes. One possibility, of course, is that the dikes and canals that the big men and women built really shaped the course of history. This possibility cannot be eliminated. But here's another possibility: the bigwigs you're talking about are just swimmers in the river of history, who set world records, win applause and fame, and go down in history for it. But all this has nothing to do with where the river goes.'

DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION IN NEW SCIENCE DISCOVERIES?

Yes, I try to find source of stories from the latest scientific discoveries, and my biggest interests are in physics and cosmology. These are directly related to human beings' latest thoughts about nature and the universe.

ARE THERE SOME DEVELOPMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY THAT YOU ANTICIPATE?

Actually, science fiction cannot predict the development of technology. It is a literature of possibilities, which can only list the various possibilities. It is impossible for SF writers to predict which of these possibilities will come true, but it is quite possible that some of them will. In fact, in order to build a strong story, SF writers often choose the most improbable possibilities, but the weird thing is, it is often those most improbable possibilities that became reality.

BY THE END OF DEATH'S END, IT FEELS LIKE A METAPHYSICAL NOVEL. AND DEEPLY ETHICAL. IS THAT FAIR?

In science fiction, if the imagination of the

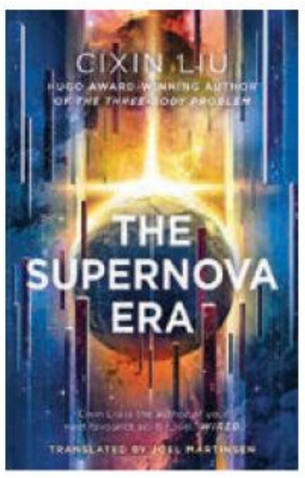


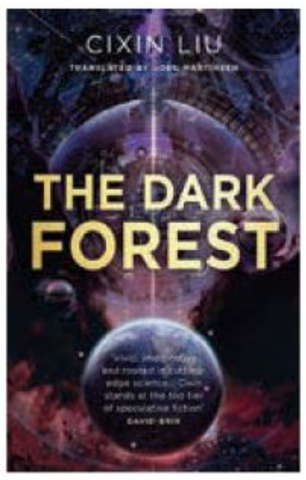
Humanity faces the vast unknowable universe.

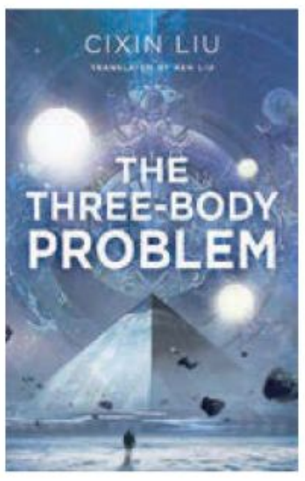


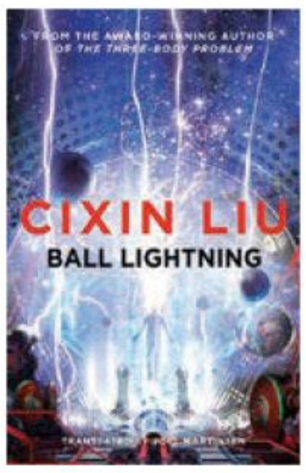


The Wandering Earth movie was a huge hit.











relationship between man and the universe reaches a vast scale in space and time, it always produces a metaphysical feeling. But I think the nature of science fiction is surreal rather than metaphysical, and I also try to describe my imaginary world in a realistic way. As for ethics, as far as I am concerned, it is constantly changing with the progress of human civilisation and the changes of the natural, social and technological environment of human beings. Only science fiction rather than realistic literature can truly portray this change.

IN YOUR SHORT STORY COLLECTION THE WANDERING EARTH, THERE'S A LOT OF HUMOUR. DO YOU ENJOY THE FREEDOM OF SHORT STORIES TO EXPERIMENT MORE?

Actually, I prefer to write long novels, because novels have more capacity to describe the background and setting of the world. I had to write so many short stories because at that time, the Chinese science fiction market was small, and it was difficult to publish long novels. So, you may have noticed that my short stories have grand backstories that read like a synopsis of a novel. I don't think short stories give more freedom than novels.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD? WHAT IS THE APPEAL OF APOCALYPSE TO YOU AS A WRITER?

As a SF writer, I view the end of the world with a normal and peaceful mind. According to the law of nature, everything in the universe, even the universe itself, has an end, so does the human world. So in science fiction, the end of the world isn't necessarily a tragedy. It's a necessary event. It's like we all know we're going to die, but it's not a tragedy. And I think of all literary genres, only science fiction can have such a generous attitude towards the end of the world.

WERE YOU PLEASED WITH THE MOVIE ADAPTATION OF THE WANDERING EARTH?

The movie was a bigger success than we expected. We thought it'd be five to ten years before this kind of a movie would appear in China. On the one hand, it presents the style of a Hollywood science fiction blockbuster; on the other, it also shows many elements of Chinese and Oriental culture. Of course, it's clear that the movie still has a lot of immature parts, and its success is largely due to Chinese audiences' tolerance of their first sci-fi blockbuster. But the movie also gives future Chinese sci-fi movies a good start.

THE THREE BODY PROBLEM HAS ALSO BEEN ADAPTED BUT NOT YET RELEASED. AND YOU ARE CREDITED AS A PRODUCER. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT THE FILM AND WHEN WE MIGHT EXPECT TO SEE IT?

The adaptation of the *Three-Body Problem* series is more complicated than *Wandering Earth* because of its longer length and more complex story. China lacks experience in making such large-scale science fiction movies, as well as a mature industrial infrastructure for shooting them, so it still takes some time to complete the adaptation and shooting of the *Three-Body Problem.* Since I'm part of the production team, I can't tell you much about it. But the adaptation of the *Three-Body Problem,* both movie and TV series, is under active preparation.

THERE HAS ALSO BEEN TALK OF AMAZON WANTING TO DO AN ADAPTATION: IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT IT?

Amazon has indeed expressed great interest and has negotiated with the rights holder in China. But I'm not quite sure about the specific situation.

WOULD YOU EVER LIKE TO WRITE DIRECTLY FOR CINEMA?

I would not directly write scripts for films. Script writing is a professional job with many restrictions, and I am not familiar with those. By contrast, I think I am better at writing novels.

IN TERMS OF SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA, WHICH FILM MAKERS AND WHAT FILMS HAVE YOU ADMIRED AND BEEN INFLUENCED BY?

First of all, Kubrick's *2001,* and *The Matrix, Interstellar, Inception, Gravity* and *The Martian* all impressed me.

FOR UK READERS WHO HAVE ENTERED CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION VIA YOUR BOOKS WHO ELSE WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?

There are many excellent science fiction writers in China, and many works worth reading. I would like to introduce Han Song first. He is a completely different writer from me. His works and mine are almost at two extremes. His works are very literary and have a larger space for interpretation. His representative works are *Red Ocean* and *Subway.* Another one I would like to introduce is Chen Qiufan, a young writer who is very sensitive to the change to the world and human nature brought about by technology. This near-future changed by technology are vividly expressed in his representative works like the *Waste Tide.*

AND WHAT IS NEXT FOR YOU?

My next step is to write a novel on a different subject from *The Three-Body Problem*. There are many options, but it takes time.

The Supernova Era by Cixin Liu is available now from Head Of Zeus.

I LOST MY BODY

JÉRÉMY CLAPIN, MARC DU PONTAVICE AND GUILLAUME LAURANT ON I LOST MY BODY

WORDS **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

One of the breakout sensations of this year's Cannes Film Festival, where it received the Critics' Week Grand Prize, French animation *I Lost My Body*, directed by Jérémy Clapin, was promptly snapped up by Netflix for global distribution in cinemas and on its streaming service. Adapted from a novel by Oscar-nominated writer Guillaume Laurant (*Amélie*), who co-wrote the screenplay with Clapin, this unique blend of 2D and 3D animation techniques tells the story of a sentient severed hand – yes, you read that right – and its mystery-tinged journey back to the rest of its body. The second of the film's two intertwining narratives follows the coming-of-age story of Moroccan immigrant Naoufel in Paris before he lost his hand.

Speaking to **SciFiNow** at the London Film Festival, where the film received its UK premiere, Laurant says the inspiration for his novel first stemmed from being "fascinated by lost gloves on the pavement on the street" and imagining a backstory behind the hands that may have occupied them. Marc Du Pontavice, a veteran producer of both animation and live-action films, became hooked on the novel for multiple reasons. "One," he says, "is that usually when you talk about someone who's lost his hand, you're talking about the person missing that hand. But this reverses the concept. Having the point of view of the hand was so incredibly new and different, which fascinated me.

"Metaphorically," he continues. "I felt it was very strong in terms of talking about memory and the autonomy of memory and how it can paralyse us in our lives. And the other thing was the absolute challenge with what cinema can achieve, especially animation; the ambition of thinking that you can have the viewer feel empathy for a character that has only five fingers to express itself. Many other elements were interesting, but I was really hooked with the story for that reason."

Clapin was scouted by Du Pontavice after the producer thought he should look to the community of shorts directors for someone to helm this feature project: "Jérémy has a huge talent for being able to create surreal from the real. He is one of those animation directors who can stay very close to reality, mundane environments and day-to-day life, while being able to generate something surreal from that."

"When I jumped onto the project," Clapin says of his approach to the hand's section of the narrative, "I had in mind *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) by Jack Arnold. I had to push the audience into a tiny point of view as much as possible. It's not only about the picture, the perspective and the angle of the camera. It's also about the sound perception, and that doesn't have to be normal. When you see a rat in front of your face, close to you, it's not the real sound of a rat. We tried that out, just for fun, and an actual rat scream is really cute. So, we had to play it really extreme with a wide range of sounds."

"If you're the size of a hand and you face a rat in the subway, it's probably a huge





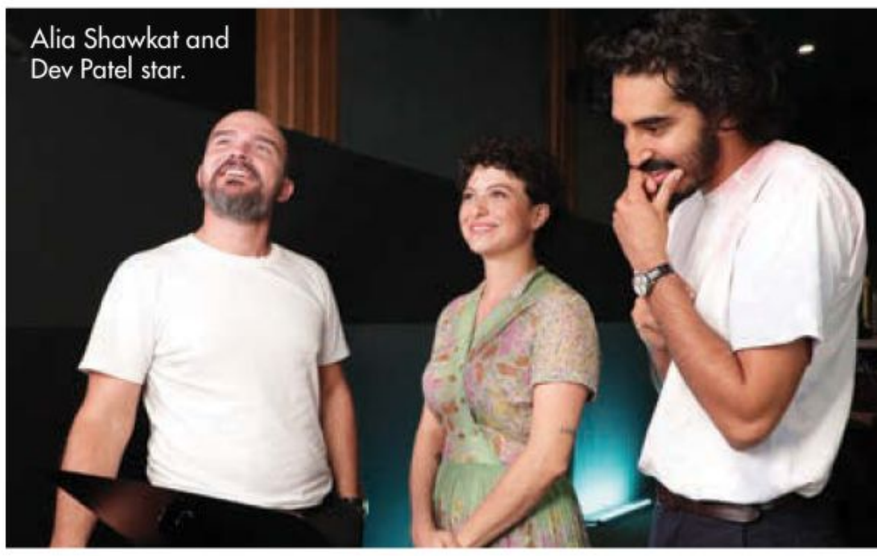
monster," Du Pontavice adds.

Aiding the sound design is the film's beautiful score from French artist Dan Levy. "When it comes to finding a composer," says Clapin, "for a director I think it's a hard task because you're bringing another author of the film on with you. I wanted a mix between real organic music with a real instrument, but someone also able to bring in electronic music with a strong melody and identity. I was listening to The Dø, a group Levy used to be part of, and I thought the melodies were really powerful. You don't know how to explain why music is good for you and not for me. If it gets under your skin, it works. And I didn't want to use music to illustrate the movement of the hand – to not make the hand like Mickey Mouse. Most of the time when we are following the hand and we are reacting to action with the hand, there is no music but only sound design. The music was also useful to create something more mystical. I really wanted to make the music something different from the Paris we're used to."

Despite the acclaim and distribution it's acquired since its Cannes premiere, as an adult-aimed animation light on dialogue in one half, with several scenes in black and white, *I Lost My Body* was not an easy sell on paper, especially since it doesn't conform to any horror genre tropes you might possibly expect from the premise – there's no *Evil Dead II*-style antics here.

"We faced the maximum obstacle that is possible in this industry," says Du Pontavice. "It's animation, it's adult, it's a bizarre pitch. The main problem we had is that people were reading the script, they were intrigued, they were saying this was well-written and they loved the characters etc but they didn't believe that a viewer would identify with this hand. It was amazingly difficult. After a few years trying to find the money, we ended up putting the money in ourselves to make it happen. But I don't blame any of those people who passed because I understand how difficult it is to share a story like this from a script point of view. There isn't any precedent for a story like this. Whenever you're not sure about a story, a lot of distributors say: "Okay, let's see what precedent exists." And with this, you can't even rely on a precedent of anything."

Du Pontavice mentions there's no precedent, but he and Clapin both stress


Alia Shawkat and Dev Patel star.

that there was also a certain creepy, kooky, mysterious, spooky and altogether ooky point of reference they were keen to avoid in terms of characterising and animating their film's hand: the character of Thing from *The Addams Family.* In an unusual twist of fate however... "We had no idea it was coming," says Du Pontavice – the animated cinematic reboot of *The Addams Family* ended up on the release schedule just weeks before *I Lost My Body's* Netflix bow. "Maybe we can use their poster," Clapin jokingly suggests.

I Lost My Body will be available on Netflix from 29 November.

The Man In The High Castle

When Worlds Collide

The Man In The High Castle is set for a war across worlds in its fourth and final season. Star Jason O'Mara takes us inside the grand finale…

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL


The BCR play a key role this season.

We've had to wait for it, but the grand finale to epic alternate history *The Man In The High Castle* is nearly upon us. After three seasons of manoeuvring through nightmarish possible pasts, mind-bending SF and complex characterisation, the adaptation of Philip K Dick's classic ended its penultimate run with a bang. Nazi leader John Smith (Rufus Sewell) has other worlds at his fingertips as resistance leader Juliana (Alexa Davalos) races to stop him (although which world she's currently in is a question we need answering ASAP).

"I think the writers knew pretty early on that this would be the last season so they had some time to prepare for that and they were able to space out and spread the episodes accordingly and it builds really, really nicely to the series finale," enthuses star Jason O'Mara. The *Agents Of SHIELD* veteran joined the show last season as black marketeer Wyatt Price, who joined Juliana's cause to fight back and spread the word about the films showing another possible world. Although the two were separated when Juliana was captured in the Season Three finale, he took things up a notch by taking a shot at Himmler in the final moments. Now, he's become a leader of men.

"He doesn't know what Juliana's fate is," O'Mara explained. "She's missing presumed dead, so he has taken it upon himself to spread the knowledge of the film around the country and to build a resistance network and mobilise and militarise them. At the beginning of Season Four he's trying to get the last shipment of films and ammunition out of Denver and the Nazis have figured out the plan, they're under attack. So we open Season Four with the Battle Of Denver and Wyatt Price up against the ropes. And he still doesn't know where Juliana is. So it's really interesting starting a character from this point of desperation in a story. Almost like the only way is up… but things can and do get worse for Wyatt!"

Indeed, this is a show which doesn't give its heroes an easy ride. The Battle Of Denver clearly isn't going to be a cakewalk for the good guys ("things have gone belly up now," reaffirms O'Mara) and over the course of the 30 episodes the resistance fighters have been put through the wringer time and time again, but this is the season when the tide could finally start to turn and O'Mara can't wait for us to see it.

"I think it's probably the most action packed season yet, I think in terms of storytelling and the most taught storyline and every character gets their moment or moments, and there's some terrific acting as well. Some of my cast mates just blew me away with some of their work. I already had a chance to see it and gosh they're so good. The Smiths' storyline in this is just epic, Joel De La Fuente's Kido storylines are fantastic and this season they get personal for him as well… So to me this is *The Man In The High Castle* just firing on all cylinders and we're going out with a bang, that's for sure!"

Helping the show build to an explosive finale and helping our beleaguered resistance fighters is Bell Mallory, a new character played by *The Gifted's* Frances Turner, who leads the BCR (Black Communist Resistance). "She plays Bell Mallory who's this Communist leader and she's doing it her way," teases O'Mara. "So you have these different approaches to resistance all trying to achieve the same ends but with different means and I don't think it's too much of a spoiler to say after Wyatt has been wiped out in Denver he has to enlist help from other resistance groups. So that's where that storyline sort of crosses over, but that part of the storyline is very emotional, very strong, and adds a great deal of dimension to *The Man In The High Castle* world."

That spirit of resistance and refusing to accept an unacceptable world is what keeps the series from becoming unwatchably grim, and the actor tells us that it has been bizarre to emerge from days shooting a show about fighting back against a fascist regime to turn on the TV and see what's happening on the news.

"We've long held that it's almost like world events are imitating the show, life imitating art rather than the other way around, which is really strange," he explains. "When you see images on the news of swastikas and right wing movements it's terrifying and you go to work and there are the swastikas and there are the Nazis. That part of it is strange and what's also strange is you sort of become a little numb to the iconography when you're at work, and then when you leave work and you see it, it can still be quite shocking. None of us were fans of the iconography and how it was used, even though we had to because it was the show and the story we were telling we all felt very uncomfortable around the iconography. So that part of it's weird. But telling a story that ultimately has a sense of hope about it and a sense of resistance and a sense of fighting back, not accepting any of it, was quite thrilling and felt quite good."

So, if you haven't caught up with one of the best SF shows on TV (or rather, streaming), now is the time. "I've talked to a few people who now they've discovered this is the final season they're like 'oh my gosh, I have to catch up!'" laughs O'Mara. "So maybe this final season will encourage new fans to find the show, watch the 30 episodes that have already been made in preparation for the big rollout on 15 November, the fourth and final season, hard to believe."

"It's the most action-packed season yet… This is The Man In The High Castle firing on all cylinders and we're going out with a bang"

Jason O'Mara

The Man In The High Castle returns to Amazon Prime on 15 November.

INVESTIGATION
Alternative Histories

ROGUE HISTORIES

AS THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE REACHES ITS FINAL SEASON, WE TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THE LONG TRADITION OF ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES IN FICTION

WORDS **GEM WHEELER**

As we wait for *The Man In The High Castle's* fourth and final season to arrive on our screens, the chilling alternate history series has never seemed more relevant. Based on Philip K Dick's 1962 novel, the show brings us a searing vision of an America disunited by the conquering Axis powers, split down the middle into territories occupied by a Nazi Reich to the east and a Japanese Empire to the west. It's a powerful reminder of a very real world war, which still looms over political discourse to this day: a conflict we still struggle to fathom as, a full century later, we grasp at the devastating legacy of the 1914–1918 slaughter that preceded it.

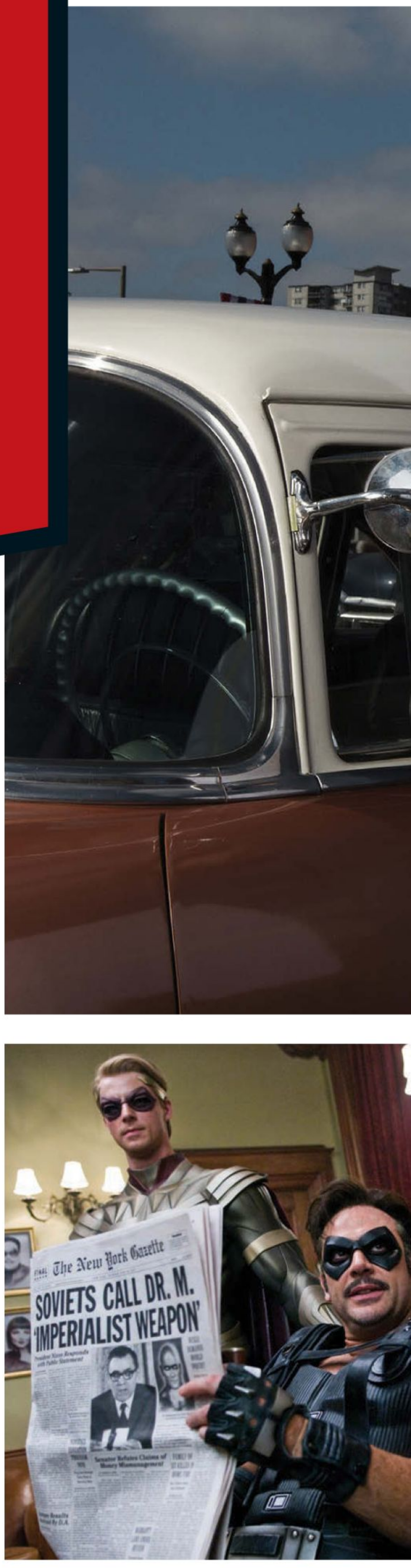
Historian Gavriel Rosenfeld is the author of *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History And The Memory Of Nazism*. He notes that the popularity of such works of alternate history tend to increase at "times of political change and upheaval. Philosophers and pamphleteers and historians in the western tradition have examined and speculated about how things might have been different. As you might guess, it's usually in moments of major transition. It's usually also when society is engaged in divisive debate among various camps. In the Fourties in England, you'll have people who are defending the king and people who are opposing him, and people who'll say that if only Charles I had acted differently, we could have forestalled the revolution.

"Today, we're living in a period of very rapid transition in all sorts of ways: post-9/11, the information revolution, the 2008 financial crash. Nobody knows exactly how this is going to wrap up, whether it'll be a dystopian nightmare or a happy ending like in *The Lord Of The Rings*," he laughs, all too aware, as a historian, of our capacity for extremes of optimism and despair. "If you feel like the present day ain't that bad, you can always imagine that it could somehow have been worse! The function of nightmare scenarios, or fantasy scenarios, is to do with present-day perspectives. Every camp tends to want to use 'what ifs' to justify their position on the present, so history just becomes a tool to be exploited for present-day gain."

Fantasy writer Ginn Hale, herself a writer of alternative histories, is thoughtful when asked to offer reasons for their enduring popularity. "I'm not sure that all alternate history has a single purpose. I think it's such a malleable genre that different creators can use it to explore a variety of concepts. The butterfly effect, time paradoxes and inescapable fates have all been explored right alongside tyranny, the environment, racism and religion."

Her vision of the genre ventures far from the dark dystopias that characterise many of its stand-out works. "Personally, I love alternate history for its capacity to surprise and delight me with both details derived from real history as well as fantastic flights of imagination. I believe that it's that quality of making the familiar feel new and delightful – or dangerously thrilling, depending upon the story – that pulls people in again and again."

It's a compelling lure with a double edge: that thrill of a new vantage point on well-trodden historical ground, sharpened by our societies' understandable tendency to revisit old traumas. Rosenfeld highlights the historical touchstones that most societies cling to as markers of identity, seemingly fixed points that fade like mirages under the distorting lens of alternative history. In a young century already blighted by political unrest, mass murder and





large-scale war, counterfactual narratives are being recast for a new, rapt audience.

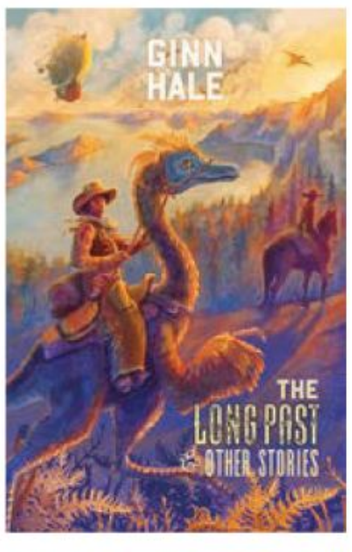
"These novels have always been sitting around waiting to be dramatised by the big screen, but now the big screen is in the form of streaming series, and the technology exists to dramatise these books in big-budget fashion, whether it's by Hulu or Amazon or Netflix," Rosenfeld tells us. "We're living in a golden age of television now for content. I think it's a perfect storm of timing and the political element and the availability of the technology to bring it to a much broader audience." It's not just US networks that have zeroed in on the potential for such adaptations. "BBC Two did *SS-GB* by Len Deighton a couple of years back. You know, were it not for the digital revolution, I think there would be more novels coming out, and people would still be reading. But when you get these crossover hits like *The Man In The High Castle* or even *Yesterday* (Richard Curtis' recent film, in which The Beatles never existed), I think it acclimates viewers to the existence of the genre of alternate history and helps it break into the mainstream."

Hale is fascinated by the genre's potential for reclaiming historical narratives, allowing us to explore alternative depictions of marginalised groups in different societies. It's an approach she finds endlessly exciting, especially when applied to her own work. "I'm primarily a fantasy author, so it felt natural to pull a bit of magic into my alternate history collection, *The Long Past And Other Stories*. That allowed me to play with the paradoxes of time travel, introduce Cretaceous dinosaurs into the 1800s, and to steadily undermine the colonial, homophobic history that I grew up with in the American west. All of my protagonists are queer, and most of them are people



'What ifs' are catnip to genre authors.





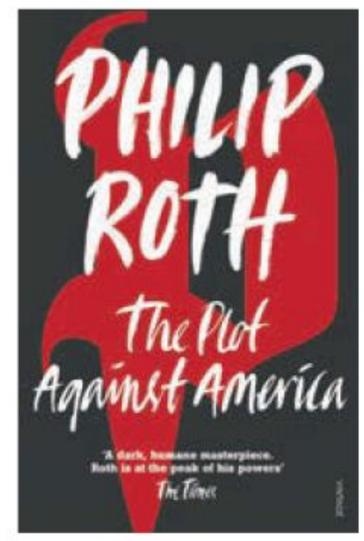
"IF YOU FEEL LIKE THE PRESENT DAY AIN'T THAT BAD, YOU CAN ALWAYS IMAGINE IT COULD SOMEHOW HAVE BEEN WORSE!"

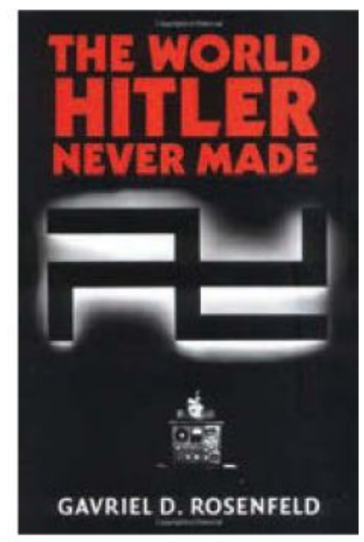
GAVRIEL ROSENFELD

of colour, so it felt important and personal to do my utmost to write stories that were empowering, triumphant and fun. Representation and diversity shouldn't be conflated with hopelessness or tragedy." As a lesbian writer, this resonates with her on a very personal level.

Rosenfeld draws a subtle but important distinction between counterfactual history and alternate history. Both come under the larger umbrella of 'what-if history', but the former presents speculative versions of actual events with a few key details altered, as historians have done for centuries. The latter, meanwhile, is "the fictional, imaginative version" that makes no attempt to shed light upon historical truth as it conjures major events that simply never happened. "In many respects, I think, the two have to be seen as twins."

There's danger in popularity, as Rosenfeld notes: "Some people have actually mistaken the new vogue for counterfactual history as a reactionary, post-truth mentality. In the process, they overlook the fact that many works of alternative history are very subversive, left-liberal, critical of capitalism or imperialism. It can be a tool of left-wing critique and right-wing critique: left-wing self-validation or right-wing self-validation. You look at a thousand years of western history, and counterfactuals are constantly being used for tendentious purposes or for rhetorical purposes. While some eras may tend towards the liberal form, the long history of this genre needed to be told as a story





Watchmen is currently airing on Sky Atlantic. _11.22.63_ is available on DVD from Warner Home Video. _Watchmen_ (2009) is available on Blu-ray from Paramount.

because most historians are dismissing this mode of history as flippant and superficial, but historians since Herodotus have been doing it. Whether it's Machiavelli or St Augustine or the authors of the Hebrew Bible, it's a human thing to do, and it's part and parcel of historical consciousness and historical writing."

How can we expect alternate histories to evolve as the century wears on? Hale's curiosity about the world and its cultures leaves her with no shortage of ideas for future writers to pursue. "I would love to see other times and particularly events other than war being explored. Innovations, natural discoveries, great and small journeys have all played huge roles in our human heritages. Every person we encounter, every object we use, even the words that make up our languages all have individual histories. The world we inhabit is ripe for imaginative storytelling. What would our modern world be like if wheat never adapted to cultivation? How different would our cultures be if we lived alongside other modern hominins, such as Denisovans and Neanderthals? So long as we can find wonder in our lives and entertain the possibilities of our pasts, then the genre really is limitless."

Hale names one genre-shaping novel as a source of continuing inspiration for many in her field. "To my mind, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Years Of Rice And Salt* was probably one of the most influential alternate history books to come along and break that mould. Not only did the book eschew American- or European-dominated conflicts and characters, but it focused on philosophy as much as it did history. The cast of characters – three of them reincarnated again and again through the ages and across different nations – even pondered the very nature of history itself, the power of scientific and military advances and their roles in both. *Years Of Rice And Salt* demonstrated just how creative and powerful a work of alternative history could be."

Rosenfeld has enjoyed a number of takes on counterfactual history, but remarks that they often fail to deliver on their initial promise. The TV adaptation of Stephen King's *11.22.63*, in which a time traveller tries to prevent John F Kennedy's assassination, stands out as an 'engrossing' attempt. "Until the very last episode, where he rushed everything to the finish line, it was wonderful!"

Philip Roth's 2004 novel *The Plot Against America's* depiction of a fascist America under the presidency of Charles Lindbergh resets the timeline to a comfortingly familiar outcome at its close. Kingsley Amis', *The Alteration*, published in 1976 and set in an England in which the Reformation never took place, is a work Rosenfeld cites with approval.

Hale's boundless optimism for the wider genre she loves stands in sharp contrast to the darker perspectives of the alternate worlds we see on our screens, while Rosenfeld's work aids us in understanding why sobering counterfactual narratives are going nowhere fast.

Such insights are crucial in understanding why alternate histories in all their forms, rich in imagination and philosophical depth, occupy a central place in popular culture. These works grant us a space to imagine worlds that never were, and to wonder how events might have played out, if only a few stitches in the great tapestry of world history had been unpicked.

The list of those 'what ifs' can anchor us to the present, consoling ourselves – not always convincingly – that our history, for all of its flaws, really is the best timeline possible. It can also allow us to look to the future with hope, as we contemplate how an unequal world still plagued by injustice might yet become a fairer place. Alternate history, whether counterfactual or imaginative reinterpretation, is a key part of our understanding of ourselves.

As long as there's human history to be remembered, our fantasies – and nightmares – of the roads not taken will live on. They can console us, pander to our prejudices or provide us with a glimmer of inspiration. Perhaps most importantly of all, they remind us that our future is still to be written.



THE BEST ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES

Ginn Hale picks out some ground-breaking alternate histories...



***The Sea Is Ours: Tales Of Steampunk Southeast Asia* – edited by Jaymee Goh and Joyce Chng**

This is a wonderful anthology of tales set across the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. Explosions and revolutionaries abound as does clockwork technology, spider battles, magical realism and volcano-powered flying ships. As with all collections, some of these stories are funny, some thrilling, and a few are heartbreaking.



***Everfair* – Nisi Shawl**

On the surface this is the story of the peoples of Congo escaping the grasp of Leopold II of Belgium and forging the new nation of Everfair. But it's so much more! Peopled by a vastly diverse cast of characters this deceptively small book spans decades and delves into issues of colonialism, racism, religion, sexism and gender identities.



***The Ballad Of Black Tom* – Victor LaValle**

The Ballad Of Black Tom doesn't technically fit the definition of alternate history. Victor LaValle wrenches apart the racist narrative of H P Lovecraft's *Horror At Red Hook* and not only gives Tom a powerful and moving voice but, in my opinion, out-writes anything Lovecraft ever penned, both in terms of depicting humanity and our monsters. This is simply fiction at its most potent.





GUISE AND DOLLS

APPLE TV+ IS BETTING BIG ON ITS UPCOMING DOLL HORROR-THRILLER SERVANT. WE TALK TO EXECUTIVE PRODUCER M NIGHT SHYAMALAN, WRITER AND CREATOR TONY BASGALLOP AND THE CAST ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT, OR NOT…

WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER** INTERVIEWS **ADAM TANSWELL**



With a filmmaking mind filled with twists and turns, M Night Shyamalan has repeatedly proven his work to be staple viewing among genre lovers everywhere. From *The Sixth Sense* and *The Village* to more recent mind-benders like *The Visit, Split* and *Glass*, Shyamalan knows how to keep an audience at the edge of their seats. Apple TV+ clearly trusts in the power of Shyamalan, too: the new streamer is set to launch *Servant*, his first TV project since *Wayward Pines*, this November in its first crop of content.

Created by British writer Tony Basgallop, who also serves as an executive producer alongside Shyamalan, *Servant* follows Dorothy and Sean (played by Lauren Ambrose and Toby Kebbell respectively), a Philadelphia couple mourning the death of their infant child. Pretty depressing already. But the show obviously comes with a Shyamalan-worthy twist: the only way Dorothy and Sean can cope with the loss is by replacing their baby with a doll and pretending she's still alive. Though Sean, at first sceptical about the idea, goes along with it he becomes increasingly more freaked out by the whole thing when they decide to hire a nanny to look after the doll.

"A lot of places wanted to make this show, and we decided to go with Apple," says Shyamalan. "I felt there was a connection between the aesthetics that we talked about and them as a company; their minimalism and passive spirituality. And also, this is an opportunity to help define a place, which was a really exciting thing for me. I love the fact that we get to help define a place with this new movement into how people watch content – and it's with the biggest company in the world. Apple has 1.6 billion devices. To have that kind of reach is incredible."

Just like Apple, Shyamalan has a reputation, and as far as Hollywood reputations go, his is bulletproof. He might have fired a couple of misses among his bounty of hits (depending on who you ask), but when audiences see his name on posters they already know what to expect: something disturbing.

"This subject is actually super important to me because that relationship with the audience is something I take very, very seriously," Shyamalan tells us. "It's a relationship that authors have in other mediums. For example, you go to read a Stephen King book and you go see a play by Neil Simon and you know what to expect. It happens in other mediums, but not necessarily in film. And so it's one that I take very, very seriously. I can't even grasp the idea of a teenager in Rio or someone in Tokyo or Sydney seeing my name and it meaning something to them – and then they pay their money to watch it. It's a big, big deal to me."

Like several of Shyamalan's other projects, *Servant* comes with a small cast and an even smaller set. The lead ensemble (if you can call it that) is made up of just Ambrose, Kebbell, Nell Tiger Free (as the nanny) and Rupert Grint (Dorothy's brother), and all ten 30-minute episodes take place in just one location – Dorothy and Sean's Philadelphia home. Something tells us it's going for a claustrophobic feeling.

"I have this thing about life," says Shyamalan. "I think we're all super powerful and whatever we're thinking about and whatever we're concentrating on, that comes back to us. The universe doesn't really go good or bad, so if you feel really bad about yourself, there's a long line of assholes out there. In art, I feel the same way. If you think very carefully about the character and make it so specific then that person will walk in and do an audition."

The director speaks from experience, as it's happened to him over and over again. Many times, he's happened to find exactly the right person for exactly the right role.

"When James McAvoy walked up to me at Comic-Con with his head shaved, I went: 'That's the guy for *Split*,'" he explains. "I didn't know who in the world could play Split, but he walked right up to me."

The same thing happened with the cast of *Servant*. "When I saw Lauren Ambrose's audition, it was like a lightning bolt. She just walked in and she was perfect. Each of the cast members started to do that for me. Toby auditioned and I was like: 'God, this guy feels like a revelation.' He's a guy's guy, but he's super sweet. And I was like: 'This is exactly how we pictured him.' I saw Toby on an episode of *Black Mirror*, which is an episode I remember distinctly. It's one of my favourites. You never know why these things stick in your head, but his performance stood out to me on that. Then he came to audition and it was all meant to be."

With both Shyamalan and the biggest tech company on the planet involved, as well as an exciting horror-thriller premise, the cast didn't take much convincing to get on board.

"Dorothy is a fascinating, tragic character," says Ambrose. "At the time this came around, I was playing Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* [on Broadway], which is a character and a piece that's very established because everyone knows so much about it. To go from that to working in a genre that I'd never worked in before – and with a master of the genre – was incredible. I knew it would involve a lot of learning and it was going to be a really fascinating exploration of grief and what people do with grief. This character, she takes her grief and expresses it in the most crazy way. Of course, we're all denying death and we're all walking around in that haze. But thanks to Tony, this character takes it to a whole other level. It was fascinating to figure it out and to play with these beautiful actors."

"I was put in a lucky position, because my character is dealing with such a huge amount of grief and guilt but I have this incredible partner in crime and it's my brother-in-law played by Rupert," says Kebbell of his character, dad Sean. "My character is a chef in the show, so I took some lessons from Drew DiTomo, who is a phenomenal cook and he was cooking with us the whole time. I had the time of my life. I'm dealing with this beautiful performance from Lauren, I get to crack wise with Rupert, so it was incredible."

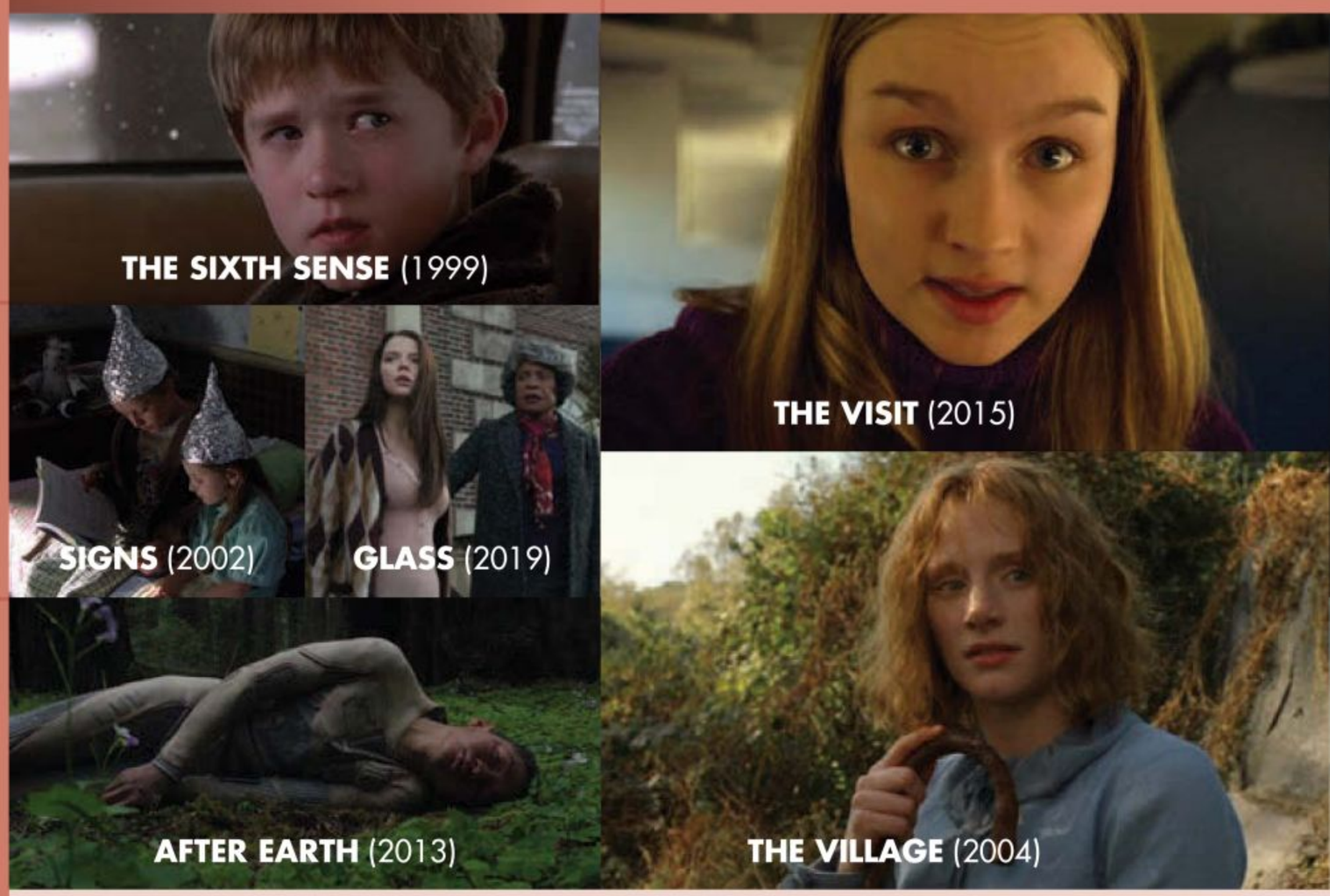
The food cooked by Sean is a key theme within the show, which may or may not come into the cryptic title. "To my character, food is everything," Kebbell continues. "He became a head chef and had a restaurant – but he closed the restaurant to start a family. But food is that thing that brings families together. It keeps them bonded."

"Food is nourishing," adds Ambrose.

When he's not cooking, Sean is 'wise-cracking' with his brother-in-law Julian,

THE M NIGHT SHYAMALAN ALIGNMENT CHART

How do Shyamalan's genre films line up?




M Night Shyamalan directed two episodes.


The story is confined to a single house.

played by Grint. "I love Julian, he's something I've never really played before, someone who is so brash," Grint enthuses. "He's outspoken and when you're reading the script, you think: 'Don't say that!' But he is so much fun – and it's almost a facade. He is someone you'd think would be quite good in a crisis. You want him around because he's always got answers and it always feels like he's one step ahead. But when he comes face to face with Leanne, that facade starts to break. You realise that he's quite a wounded and quite a vulnerable guy. That was something that I found really interesting in the character."

Leanne, the nanny, is one of the show's more mysterious characters. "You can't really figure her out for most of the series," says actress Nell Tiger Free. "She's the big question mark in the house. What is she? Why is she here? And that lent itself to my acting style, which was helpful because I'm not very good at big stuff. Night was really helpful in drawing the performance out of me when I needed to go a little bit further and give a bit more. Leanne is very different from anything I'd ever played before, so it felt like stepping into new shoes."

"[With Leanne], we were looking to find a new colour that we hadn't seen before," explains Shyamalan. "[Nell] has this quiet, mysterious quality of someone who's discovering themselves in the world. The character of Leanne is perfect for the genre audience. There's a mythology for her character that we will slowly let you in on as we go."

Though *Servant* is clearly going for disturbing, viewers can also expect the tension to be sliced with humour. "The premise is so tragic and weird and scary – but is also oddly, inappropriately funny," admits Shyamalan. "And Tony is super funny. All of them in the cast are hilarious and it turned out that that's been the tone that I've been really interested in with *The Visit* and with *Split*. I'm really interested in the way that people can be scared and laugh at the same time."

When you put horror and babies together, it's hard not to think of *Rosemary's Baby*. The show will no doubt be compared to it upon its release. But with his story, writer Basgallop was searching for something completely new. Instead of revolving the whole thing around the doll, he's betting a lot on the simple location and the kinds of stories it could inspire.

"A sense of excitement came when I made the decision that we shouldn't ever leave the house," Basgallop tells us, "because what that does is it forces you to do something different with the writing. Having written on many different shows – and I've been doing this job for a long time – you realise that you get a little bit tired sometimes. But when you give yourself that restriction, it changes everything. I think there's probably a lot of movies that have done that; that have drawn a tight perimeter around the storytelling. It really helps because you cannot tell the story the way your instinct tells you to, so you have to sculpt and you have to think again."

"Tony wrote every single episode of *Servant* and you feel it," says Shyamalan, who directed two. "It feels like a singular voice is telling you a story. It doesn't have unconscious movements and compromises that hound us. This is a very daring piece and it has some super entertaining, super-fun scaring moments, but there's a great ethos of emotion underneath it that Tony has brought out. His dialogue is so sharp and so biting. It's a dream thing for me that Tony brought me this story and that we get to do this together."

"[The story] all dates back to having kids," continues Basgallop. "I think anyone who's had kids understands the notion that anything can go wrong at any time. I'm a clumsy guy, so when I had kids, it was really treacherous for my family. You get through it, but it changes your life. New people come into your life. You make new friends. You find new hobbies. You go trampolining and stuff like that, so your life absolutely changes. Whenever you're doing a drama, I think change is always a good thing because you put your characters in an uncomfortable position and that was the germ of this idea."

If Shyamalan's body of work proves anything it's that you don't need drama on the same scale as raging cities or colossal disasters to create a nightmare. Sometimes a small town, a village or even a cornfield will do. A lot can happen in one house, as *Servant* will likely prove. Whatever it has in store for us, we're sure it will end in tears. Just probably not the doll's.

Servant will premiere on Apple TV+ on 28 November.

CHAOTIC


UNBREAKABLE (2000)


SPLIT (2016)


THE LAST AIRBENDER (2010)

IT'S A JUNG



ONLY A HANDFUL of franchises can get away with recasting their lead roles as a way of keeping things fresh. *Doctor Who* invented regeneration so it could continue on forever. *James Bond* hires a younger and better looking 007 every 10 to 15 years as a matter of tradition (and to keep box office dollars rolling in…).

Even fewer franchises can change their characters but hold onto their cast. Anthology series have caught onto the latter, with the likes of *American Horror Story* and Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting* series wiping their stories and characters but keeping their casts with each new season.

However, Sony's rebooted *Jumanji* has figured out how to hold onto both its cast and its story but change its characters for the sequel.

Though the detention kids destroyed the Jumanji console at the end of *Welcome To The Jungle, The Next Level* trailer sees Spencer find a way to put it back together again to re-enter the game.

The first film went heavy on the characterisation, and had Dwayne Johnson play the game as the avatar of nerdy high schooler Spencer, tiny Kevin Hart portray hench footballer Fridge, Karen Gillan play insecure, cynical Martha and Jack Black take on pretty, phone-obsessed popular girl Bethany. Though each actor was arguably perfectly cast in the first film, *The Next Level* is dead set on keeping things fresh. Upon rejoining the game that almost got them all killed back in 2017, the avatars have been shuffled completely.

Upon facing the sequel, finding a way to mix things up was the top priority for director and co-writer Jake Kasdan. "We needed to figure out how to invigorate it again, despite the fact that we made the other movie so recently," he tells us. "Part of how we did that was by changing who everyone is playing. Our conceit allows for

GLE IN THERE



AS THE PLAYERS PREPARE TO RE-ENTER THE JUNGLE, WE TALK TO WRITER AND DIRECTOR JAKE KASDAN ABOUT WHAT'S IN THERE WAITING FOR THEM IN JUMANJI: THE NEXT LEVEL... WORDS **POPPY-JAY PALMER**

that, and that was the first big idea."

Martha is back in the shorty shorts of dance-fight expert Ruby Roundhouse (Gillan), but Fridge is stuck in the body of cartographer Professor Shelly Oberon, and Bethany and Spencer are nowhere to be found.

In the spirit of keeping things fresh, the avatars of Dr Smolder Bravestone (Johnson) and his little sidekick Franklin 'Mouse' Finbar (Hart) are taken on by the one and only Danny DeVito as Spencer's cranky grandpa Eddie and the ever-brilliant Danny Glover as Eddie's eccentric friend Milo.

"You can see in the trailer what [DeVito and Glover] are doing, and that idea of having these two guys who are in a really different point in their lives than our original protagonists join the world and have these experiences that the kids went through in the first movie was certainly our big jumping-off point for the sequel," Kasdan continues. "It was how we felt like we could make it new again and use the concept in a different application that was still really fun and funny, and could also have a little bit of a different relevance to people."

For the director, gaining huge names like DeVito and Glover was a dream come true. "Danny and Danny are two of my absolute favourite actors," he tells us. "They are two guys that I grew up just loving, and they were our perfect two gentlemen to play those parts. It was a total thrill that they were game to do it, and it was really just a joyful couple of weeks with those guys. They are both brilliant and kind and the kind of iconic actors that you're standing there with them and there's a part of you that can't believe it.

"We were all knocked out by what it was to have those guys around. There's only one Danny Glover and there's only one Danny DeVito. There only ever will be one of those guys. When Danny DeVito walks on set you think, this is a film icon in the



Fridge is now stuck in Shelly's body...



The fantastic cast is back to take on the next level.

truest meaning of the word. He is this completely unique presence and the fact he was willing to lend that to our movie was wonderful."

On top of the presence of DeVito and Glover, we also have Johnson and Hart attempting to play them, taking on their well-known voices and mannerisms. The result will hopefully be as entertaining as you would expect.

"I think both guys, Dwayne and Kevin, really saw what could be great fun about that and embraced it completely," says Kasdan. "We talked a lot beforehand about who we were going to go and find, and we have been fortunate that our sensibilities on these movies have been closely aligned, and so when we brought Danny and Danny to DJ and Kevin they both immediately said yes. That helped me to recruit those guys, and they are both just brilliant in those parts."

For the ensemble of actors, one thing that makes the world of *Jumanji* very different from anything else they do is the fact that they are given the chance to play characters that are so far removed from what they would usually play.

"For DJ to be playing this nerdy kid in the first movie," says Kasdan, "and then playing this older, grumpy, physically impaired guy in the new one, and for Kevin to be playing a football player in the first one and then this incredibly sweet and slow-talking older man in this one, for Jack to be playing a teenaged girl... I think that they completely embrace and love that aspect for these movies."

Even more *Next Level* fresh blood comes in the form of Awkwafina. The actress/comedian has been killing it recently, appearing in hit films like *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Ocean's 8*, as well as leading the cast of this year's intercontinental comedy-drama *The Farewell*, directed by Lulu Wang. Unlike DeVito and Glover, however, her role in the *Jumanji* sequel is being kept under wraps for the time being.

"She is playing a new character in the world of *Jumanji*, in the game, and she is wonderful," Kasdan tells us. "That was exactly the sort of dream fusion of new comedy energy and new overall energy into the movie that you would hope for when you make a sequel in such a short time. She joined with this new very close-knit group of the original four. She's got a lot to do, and she was great and game and I love what she does in the movie."

As well as changing the characters, *The Next Level* will also change the locations. Obviously it's still set in *Jumanji*, but now we finally get to see more than just the jungle. If you followed Dwayne Johnson on Instagram ahead of the first film's release, you will know from his constant stream of delightful set videos that most of it was shot on location

in Hawaii. Things were a little bit different for *The Next Level*: owing to the demands of the visual effects, much of it had to be filmed on built sets on studio stages.

However, the last few months of filming took the cast and crew to the great outdoors, but this time they went further than just Hawaii. With more than just a jungle to capture, the movie explored the beautiful landscapes of New Mexico, the deserts down south near the Mexican border, and the snowy mountains of Canada.

"There was this incredible experience at the end, we all sort of packed up and went on a travelling roadshow, taking the movie to all these different places for a week at a time, and just saw some spectacular places for the movie," Kasdan tells us. "Prior to these two movies, I had never done anything that required anything like these kinds of locations. One of the things that's been so great with this has been being able to get out there with our team and our actors and being in these places, and it just puts you in the reality in a way that is really kind of joyful… There's this authenticity to having these experiences that communicate through to the movie."

Though Kasdan relishes the chance to work in such stunning locations, the lack of a studio lot does tend to make his job a lot harder; working against the elements is just as taxing as you would imagine.

"It's far more physical and everybody sleeps well at night because they're full and very physical days, even in spectacular places," Kasdan explains. "It's rigorous, so you're doing long days with the weather and temperature and all that, but it's all totally invigorating as well. I think I can speak for really all the filmmakers and most of the actors when I say they dig it. They love being out there. Except for Kevin, who spends the whole time talking about how he'd rather not be there… But it's mostly tongue-in-cheek. He actually loves it, even if he doesn't want to admit it."

The Next Level may well be the last time Kasdan and the ensemble tap into the world of *Jumanji* – the director isn't one to leave a door open at the end of a story for the sake of leaving room for a sequel. "To me, I feel like in order to do a good job on any [one film] I have to feel like that could be it," he laughs. "And I do feel like this could be it!"

A sequel didn't seem likely after *Welcome To The Jungle*, when the film tied up loose ends and had the gang drop a bowling ball on the *Jumanji* console. But studios always find a way to jimmy the door back open if there's a want for it.

"That said, if it's something that people want more of and we feel like we have an idea to stand up alongside the others then who knows?" Kasdan continues. "There are threads that we could continue to explore, for sure… But for this moment, I'm entirely focused on finishing *The Next Level* and making it all it can be for people, and hoping that they dig it."

After growing up loving these kinds of adventure movies that leave you on the edge of your seat and wanting more, Kasdan feels fortunate to have been able to make a couple himself. "If you grow up wanting to make movies I think this is one of the things that you want to make. This is the kind of movie that makes you feel that way. And yet the ideas are really hard to find, the good version of it is really hard to find, and the fact that this one showed up for me and I had this opportunity and was able to continue it into a second movie is just a thrill."

However, the highlight for him was the people he got to make them with. "On top of that, we all really like each other," he grins. "We've had a joyful experience making these things together. DJ, it was the first I've ever worked with him and it's been this great partnership. Kevin and I knew each other from a long time ago but have not worked closely. Jack Black and I worked together for years and he's one of my absolute favourite people to work with, and one of my favourite people, [period]. Karen is somebody that I'd never worked with before but I'd admired for a long time. And we all just really enjoy each other's company. It's an amazing ensemble. The other great part about it is working with that team. We've been lucky."

"IF YOU GROW UP WANTING TO MAKE MOVIES I THINK THIS IS ONE OF THE THINGS THAT YOU WANT TO MAKE"
JAKE KASDAN


Same avatars, but very different personalities.

Jumanji: The Next Level is in cinemas on 11 December.

CHOOSE YOUR PLAYER
The best (and worst) genre video game films not actually based on a videogame…



SPY KIDS 3-D: GAME OVER (2003)
The Spy Kids save the world from Sylvester Stallone using nothing but their gaming skills and the third dimension.



GAMER (2009)
Michael C Hall controls other humans with computer programming as Gerald Butler tries to stop him in this monstrosity of a film.



WRECK-IT RALPH (2012)
Disney's animation plays on all the classic videogame tropes and characters while making them its own.



PIXELS (2015)
This Eighties turd of a film may have been inspired by a number of videogames but none of them had Adam Sandler in them.



READY PLAYER ONE (2018)
A Chosen One adopts an avatar for a quest in this videogame film based on a book based on an entire decade.



BLACK MIRROR, 'BANDERSNATCH' (2018)
It's not technically a film but its cultural impact earns it a spot on the list.

COMPETITION

Harry Potter



WIN HARRY POTTER GOODIES!

WIN A BUNDLE OF WIZARDING WORLD CORGI DIE-CAST MERCHANDISE WORTH OVER £85 WITH OUR COMPETITION...

IF YOU'RE MISSING the Wizarding World and dreaming of re-enrolling at Hogwarts, do we have the merch for you. British brand Corgi has launched a brand new range of magical die-cast models inspired by the Harry Potter series, including the Hogwarts Express, the Knight Bus and the Weasley's flying Ford Anglia... And you can win them!

The Hogwarts Express is one train you don't want to miss, and not just because the tickets probably cost a bomb. This one-stop locomotives transports young witches and wizards from all over the UK from Platform 9 ¾ at London's King's Cross all the way to Hogsmeade station, the wizarding village just outside of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, at the start of every new school year. Find a cosy compartment, treat yourself to some magical refreshments, and start your academic year by making life-long friends (or enemies) aboard the Hogwarts Express. You better be on board at 11 o'clock on 1st September, or you'll be left finding your own way to school...

Which brings us to the Weasley's Ford Anglia. On the outside, this unassuming car could be mistaken for any other. But after a tinkering from Arthur Weasley himself, the blue Ford Anglia not only takes off and flies above the clouds, it also features a sophisticated (if a little rusty) invisibility booster -- making you less likely to be spotted and arrested by the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office. If you find yourself in a pickle but haven't yet passed your Apparition test, take a leaf out of Harry and Ron's book in the Chamber Of Secrets and take to the skies in a flying car. Just don't let Mrs Weasley find out.

When things quite literally blow up with Aunt Marge at Privet Drive in The Prisoner Of Azkaban, the Knight Bus pulls up to help Harry escape the Dursleys for another summer before school started. Manned by driver Ernie Prang and spotty conductor Stan Shunpike, the bright purple Knight Bus boasts three floors of ornate four poster beds and the ability to squeeze through traffic undetected better than any muggle bus. Thanks to Corgi, you can now own your own tiny replica of the Knight Bus and conduct your own high-speed adventures to literally anywhere (except places underwater). Public transport has never been this awesome.

Corgi brings all of these enchanted vehicles to life with its new collection of gorgeous die-cast models. As new additions to the company's wide variety of film, TV and music memorabilia, these collectables are as true to the films as they can possibly be, with detail going into everything from the exact colour of the paintjobs to the tiny registration plates.

For your chance to win, go to our online competition at scifinow.co.uk/competitions/corgi-win and answer the following question:

WHAT TREE DO HARRY AND RON CRASH THE FORD ANGLIA INTO IN HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS?

A THE SHRIEKING SHRUB

B THE CACKLING CACTUS

C THE WHOMPING WILLOW

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SciFiNow

REVIEWS

OUR THOUGHTS ON THE PICK OF THE ENTERTAINMENT RELEASES OUT THIS MONTH



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"A strong adaptation, scary and affecting"

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CINEMA Add your thoughts regarding the latest blockbuster theatrical releases on the *SciFiNow* website.

DVD AND BLU-RAY Discover our opinions on the latest film and television releases and add your own comments.

TOP 10s Read our lists relating to our favourite genre shows, and give your thoughts on whether we were right.

AWARD EXPLAINED
THE 'MUST SEE NOW' AWARD GOES TO REVIEWS THAT SCORE FOUR OR FIVE...

SciFiNow MUST SEE NOW



Dan Torrance is forced to confront the nightmares of his past.



Release Out now
Director
Mike Flanagan
Cast Ewan McGregor, Rebecca Ferguson, Kyleigh Curran, Cliff Curtis, Zahn McClarnon
Distributor
Warner Bros.
Certificate 15

TRIVIA
THE DOCTOR SLEEP PRODUCTION TEAM USED KUBRICK'S BLUEPRINTS FOR THE OVERLOOK... BUT IT DIDN'T ALL MATCH.



Doctor Sleep

What's up, Doc?

Mike Flanagan may have already tackled King with his strong take on *Gerald's Game*, but with *Doctor Sleep* he has the opportunity to have his cake and eat it too, to faithfully adapt the author's version of what happened next and to take the audience back to Kubrick's Overlook. He also has the opportunity to build a giant hedge maze and get lost in it and it's really quite impressive to discover that he's mostly done the former.

Inevitably, it's far more King than Kubrick, a faithful adaptation of the 2013 novel which finds the adult Dan Torrance (Ewan McGregor) trying to put his demons behind him by working at a care home. While he's using his Shine to help the dying residents shuffle off the mortal coil peacefully, out there is Rose The Hat (Rebecca Ferguson) and the True Knot, a band of monsters who murder children and feed on their psychic powers. When they set their sights on young Abra (the wonderful Kyleigh Curran), our hero will have to find the courage to fight to protect her.

The two and a half hour running time may seem a bit much given that it's one of King's shorter recent efforts (a mere 531 pages!), but there is a lot of ground to cover and Flanagan is determined to get to all of it. Each of the three lead characters is given time and space to grow. There's a touch of Darabont in the filmmaker's willingness to embrace the big old heart lurking in King's novels and his ability to temper it with real fear. We even get to see how the True Knot is a kind of twisted family who depend on each other to survive (a great ensemble group including *Westworld's* Zahn McClarnon, *Lights Out's* Emily Alyn Lind and *Twin Peaks'* Carel Struycken), but we see just how deadly they are in a violent and shocking sequence.

Speaking of the True Knot, Rebecca Ferguson steals best in show as Rose; alluring but unsettling, charming but iron-willed, and absolutely terrifying. The film's most unnerving sequence actually has nothing to do with the Overlook at all, as the camera tracks her on a remote viewing mission floating through clouds, over city lights, slowly but surely locking on Abra's street, then her house, then her bedroom window... It's a childhood nightmare that won't stop until someone gets hurt, and when that essential King idea that bad dreams have real teeth is foregrounded it works beautifully.

As for *The Shining* stuff, well, to go into too much detail would be telling. The meticulously reconstructed set is stunning and while there are some slightly misjudged big swings, Flanagan successfully locks into the trauma at the heart of Dan's story and it's moving stuff. With that being said, Dan is frequently the film's biggest weakness. It's no fault of McGregor's, who does good-hearted but trauma-twitchy well, but he suffers the most from that sense of King-placating treacle. We do see him at his worst and it's great when we see him at his best, but there are too many cheesy lines and clunky moments in the film's mid-section that make us miss the far more thrilling Rose or Abra.

However, the occasional lapse in dialogue and unnecessary lull aside, this is a strong adaptation. It's scary and affecting and it brings one of King's best modern villains to life beautifully. There are many ways in which *Doctor Sleep* could have been a disaster, so to have a return to the Overlook send a shiver down the spine instead of a critical shudder, or worse, a disinterested shrug, is a thrill.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★★

Zombieland: Double Tap

Back for gore

Release Out now
Director Ruben Fleischer
Cast Woody Harrelson, Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone, Abigail Breslin, Rosario Dawson
Distributor Sony Pictures
Certificate 15



Double Tap begins with Jesse Eisenberg's know-it-all hero Columbus marvelling that we have shown up to find out what's going on with the Zombieland survivors ten years on, that trademark meta humour trying to paper over the looming question of: why? The original movie was great fun, a highlight of that late-Noughties zom-com boom, but do we need another one?

Well, quite frankly, no, we don't, as it turns out, but there is a strong argument to be made that watching this fantastic cast regroup to bicker, grow and take out zombies in creative ways is justification enough to buy a ticket. It is the most compelling one provided by the film itself and it's certainly fun watching them back in character.

The main problem is the script, which starts promisingly with a now teenage Little Rock (Breslin) dying to break free and find people her own age. When she and Wichita (Stone) ditch their makeshift family in the White House, the stage is set for another cross-country road trip dodging the undead to save the teen from the terrible clutches of a smug hippie (Avan Jogia).

The opening 15-20 minutes do feature a lot of laughs, possibly helped along by a healthy dose of nostalgia and a great update on the zombies' evolution, but as the story progresses it becomes increasingly clear that there isn't a lot there and, crucially, those laughs dry up. So much of the humour is based on self-referencing or relying on Harrelson to go big, and the MVP is actually newcomer Zoey Deutch, who works so hard to make nice but dim mallrat Madison funny and weird that it starts to feel at odds with how much the film and other characters are determined to make you dislike her.

The action and gore are disappointingly fine too, with the exception of one excellent brawl with some high profile new faces, and the final act is so rushed and unpredictable it feels more like something from a hurried-into-production sequel than something that took a decade to come together.

And yet, if you like this gang, there is fun to be had. It's a great core cast, there are some good splatter moments, and there are a fair few laughs. But the whole thing just feels so lacklustre and forgettable that it's hard not to resent this missed opportunity.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★☆☆☆

▲ All four *Zombieland* stars have been nominated for Oscars but only Emma Stone has actually won.

The Addams Family

Spooky AND ooky

Release Out now
Directors Greg Tiernan, Conrad Vernon
Cast Oscar Isaac, Charlize Theron, Chloë Grace Moretz, Finn Wolfhard
Distributor Universal
Certificate PG



The Addams family's first feature-length animated adventure sees newlyweds Gomez (Isaac) and Morticia (Theron) move to an isolated gothic house in order to raise a family away from pitchfork-wielding villagers.

However, their privacy is threatened years later when a town is built on their doorstep, and they're forced to integrate with the neighbours, all while preparing for a visit from their extended family.

The characters are all true to form, and the film plays them broad (sometimes a little too broad, in the case of Uncle Fester), but the character design work is wonderful, and very faithful to the original comic strips.

As with all versions of *The Addams Family,* the message here is that the weird but loving Addams' are actually more functional than the 'normal' people around them. This version takes that theme and uses it to comment on the way social media is used to stoke hatred against people who are outwardly 'different'. It's a heavy-handed and obvious theme, and one that's a little too earnest to allow for the subversive humour associated with the characters.

There are glimpses of wicked humour – even the weirdo Addams' vaccinate their kids – and some promising but frustratingly unexplored avenues, like Morticia's annoyance with Gomez's extended family intruding, and Wednesday (Moretz) deciding to rebel by going to a normal school and wearing a pink hairclip. (Pink, Morticia tells her, is a "gateway colour"). Surely Wednesday attending school is rich enough to have been the main meat of the story, rather than simply two scenes?

The film would have done well to keep things simple, and leave the characters room to breathe. Wednesday is a hoot, as always, but Morticia is constricted by the story even more than by her corsets. The real delight of the film, though, is Oscar Isaac as Gomez. He, like all the characters, isn't given anywhere near enough to do, but his performance is so boisterously heartfelt that he sweeps you along, and leaves you hoping that one day he'll get to play the character in live action.

Abigail Chandler

★★☆☆☆





Terminator: Dark Fate

There is no fate but what we make

Release Out now
Director Tim Miller
Cast Linda Hamilton, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mackenzie Davis, Natalia Reyes, Gabriel Luna
Distributor 20th Century Fox
Certificate 15



In this latest sequel – the one that pretends that no other sequels happened after *Judgment Day* – Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) is back and ready to lend a hand when a far more advanced Terminator (Gabriel Luna) tries to kill Dani (Natalia Reyes), a woman who clearly has an important role to play in saving the altered future of the human race. Dani already has assistance in the form of augmented human, Grace (Mackenzie Davis), who's been sent from the future to protect her, but the three together are a force to be reckoned with.

While so many of the *Terminator* films have made John the focus, there is a delightful shift here that acknowledges the importance of Sarah and everything she has done to keep both him and his future safe. In newcomers Dani and Grace, she gets amazing new comrades in the ongoing fight against the machines.

The action is impressive (apart from one sequence that gets so over-the-top that it's hard to know where to look). The fight scenes here feel more intimate: there's more hand-to-hand combat and the choreography and execution of those sequences work brilliantly. Of course, there's plenty of big explosive action, too.

Getting Hamilton's Sarah and Schwarzenegger's Terminator back was a bold move and one that could have backfired. Yet seeing the two of them together is just as magic as fans might have hoped. There is history there and the emotional baggage these characters bring with them is not forgotten.

It's no *T2* (what is?!) but in *Terminator: Dark Fate* we have the sequel *Terminator 1* and *2* deserved. The character development mixed with the action means that fans can continue the story with the characters they loved, while still finding time to enjoy something new and exciting with Grace, Dani and a new Terminator. It's fun, smart and action-packed and retains the heart at its non-mechanical core.

Amanda Keats

★★★★★

Linda Hamilton began playing Sarah Connor in 1984 – 35 years ago.

Countdown

You can't cheat the death app!

Release Out now
Director Justin Dec
Cast Elizabeth Lail, Anne Winters, Charlie McDermott
Distributor STX International
Certificate 15



Writer/director Justin Dec reworks and updates a *Final Destination* style horror for the Snapchat generation with a slasher movie revolving around a 'death app' that literally counts down the days a person has left to live. The film starts off in typical style with a bunch of teenagers playing a drinking game. One of them dares the rest to download the app and soon enough the pack mentality insidiously pressures even the most reluctant to take part. Of course, that one teenage girl has the least time left, and is imminently taken out. Her boyfriend ends up at the hospital and passes the curse on to recently registered nurse Quinn (Elizabeth Lail) and her male colleagues played by Charlie McDermott and Peter Facinelli. The men have years to live and Quinn less than three days.

Dec clocks what makes a fun teen horror. In many ways this is a throwback to the late Nineties/early Noughties era of genre filmmaking with a banging soundtrack and brutal kills. The addition of smartphones refreshes the formula; however, technology isn't the main enemy, with the real terror rooted in human behaviour and demonic entities. Like *Final Destination*, young people are confronted with their mortality but instead of premonitions of their demise they are greeted by past traumas.

The 'Countdown' app hilariously and incessantly screeches notifications like a fun house ride, reminding users that they are violating the terms and conditions. Dec further dials up the humour with supporting characters such as a Lil Nas X loving priest gamely played by P J Byrne and the appearance of comedian Tom Segura as a snarky tech geek who tries to write a workaround across Latin coding. With the additional help of love interest and fellow app user, Matt (Jordan Calloway) Quinn eventually grasps the rules and how to bend them.



Lail is terrific in the lead role and gets a satisfying one liner for the ages, with the film tapping into themes such as the #timesup movement and the moral implications behind the monetisation of the health-care system. *Countdown* teases the most out of its 90-minute run time, blending deadly serious and enjoyable horror in equal measure.

Katherine McLaughlin

★★★★★

Judy & Punch

He's behind you!

Release 15 November
Director Mirrah Foulkes
Cast Mia Wasikowska, Damon Herriman, Benedict Hardie
Distributor Picturehouse Entertainment
Certificate 15





There are shades of Angela Carter's feminist fairy tales in Australian director Mirrah Foulkes's debut feature as it reimagines the violently misogynistic British seaside puppet attraction *Punch & Judy*.

The film posits the notion that they are a couple living in the imaginary town of Seaside – a medieval society where stoning, hangings and the stupidity of the pack mentality runs riot. It's a world where women who step out of line are considered witches and brute force is the rule of the land.



Mia Wasikowska plays Judy, the one with all the talent when it comes to the fine art of puppetry. With her husband Punch (Damon Herriman) they run a rowdy theatre show where the punters howl with laughter when Judy gets a smack in the face. When Punch's unruly behaviour and destructive alcoholism leads to a series of tragic incidents, Foulkes uses intoxicating magic realism to further the narrative. Without wanting to give too much away it looks to women and the outliers to seize the power back.

The magnificent, rural landscapes of Australia, where hooded figures roam with intent provide a striking backdrop for a fantasy revenge to unfold. It switches between these vast settings and the richly realised mise en scène of cosier dwellings where scarlet curtained stages and cobbled streets hide wicked secrets and the wooded enclaves outside of town offer enticing sanctuary.

Foulkes is absolutely intent on subverting the audience's expectations by continually confronting shifting standards of acceptability in the entertainment industry. It strikes out the idea of a utopia where men don't exist at all (as heavenly as that is portrayed) and allows feminist rage to kick back by storming the heavily guarded gates of the patriarchy.

Judy & Punch is a film that demands justice for its female characters and, in turn, suggests the best way to fight back is to assemble and openly call out offenders. Wasikowska is electrifying as she leads the charge against oppression in an impressively mounted debut with real fire in its belly that marks Foulkes out as one to watch.

Katherine McLaughlin

★★★★☆

▲ Writer-director Mirrah Foulkes is also an actor, seen in the likes of *Animal Kingdom* and *Top Of The Lake*.

Promare

Studio Trigger warning

Release 26 November
Director Hiroyuki Imaishi
Cast Ken'ichi Matsuyama, Taichi Saotome, Masato Sakai, Rikiya Koyama, Ayane Sakura
Distributor Anime Limited
Certificate TBC



The opening of *Promare* establishes that the sudden combustion of various people across the globe caused severe damage to the world. This was the first appearance of the Burnish, a race of hitherto unknown mutant beings with the ability to wield flames.

Thirty years later, a firefighting mecha service, Burning Rescue, has been created to put a stop to similar catastrophes. The arrival of a new group of aggressive mutants known as 'Mad Burnish' sets up a conflict between its leader, Lio Fotia, and over-eager firefighter Galo Thymos, but all is not quite as it seems and the fate of the planet is at stake.

Launched in 2011, Japanese animation house Studio Trigger has developed a passionate following among anime fans, with its body of TV series work including *Little Witch Academia* and *Kill La Kill*. The latter, in particular, was very well received for its over-the-top absurdity, with a review by IGN referring to that show as a "magical girl anime on speed".

To flirt with the same territory of that *Kill La Kill* review, *Promare*, Studio Trigger's feature film debut made in collaboration with studios XFLAG and Sanzigen, is like a mecha anime on speed. But it's also a bit like *X-Men* on speed. And also, somehow, a bit like Ron Howard's firefighting drama *Backdraft* on speed. Or at least Ritalin.

A worthy contender for the most hyperactive feature animation ever made, *Promare*, directed by *Kill La Kill* and *Gurren Lagann* veteran Hiroyuki Imaishi, cumulatively feels like watching about 17 different films at once.

Its animation design and storytelling simultaneously operate in modes of explosive maximalism and abstract minimalism. It frequently doesn't make sense but rarely pauses long enough for that to really matter. None of this should work but it all hangs together.

To try and convey a sense of *Promare's* tone, a giant robot in it is literally called 'Deus X Machina'. Miraculously, the sensory overload high consistently lasts its almost two-hour runtime. Make sure you see this beautiful, creative chaos on the biggest screen you can.

Josh Slater-Williams

★★★★☆



I Lost My Body

You'll believe a hand can cry

Release 22 Nov (cinemas), 29 Nov (Netflix)
Director Jérémy Clapin
Cast Hakim Faris, Victoire Du Bois, Patrick d'Assumçao
Distributor Netflix
Certificate 15
Format NETFLIX

SciFiNow MUST SEE NOW



Adapted from a novel by co-screenwriter Guillaume Laurant (*Amélie*), *I Lost My Body* is the feature debut of Jérémy Clapin, a man known for directing animated shorts with odd premises. One example is *Skhizein* (2008), in which a person who has been struck by a meteorite has to adjust to living 91 centimetres from himself.

I Lost My Body is also concerned with displacement. From the title, one might expect a story similar to David Lowery's *A Ghost Story*, with a phantasm dealing with (after)life after death. But while *I Lost My Body* has a similar melancholy tone, it focuses on a still alive human and his also alive dismembered hand.

Clapin and Laurant intertwine the story of a sentient hand, escaping morgue storage and journeying across Paris, and that of Naoufel, the young man who previously housed the hand. As a child, Naoufel moved from Morocco to France after his parents died in a car crash, going to live with his indifferent uncle, his dreams slowly diminishing in the context of lonely city life.

While the film succeeds in making you care for a protagonist with only five digits to express itself, what doesn't work is Naoufel's half of the narrative, due to one plot choice: the start to his love story involves him secretively following someone home and managing to befriend them. While his behaviour's eventually called out, that comes late enough in the film that your mileage may vary as to the extent to which his actions receive appropriate consequences in what is a coming-of-age tale about getting one's act together – the hand loss is not the consequence in question, to clarify. For a film in which a severed hand fights off rats, that story beat ends up being the creepiest part.

Josh Slater-Williams

★★★★★



I Lost My Body was in production for no less than seven years.

Der Golem

Feet of clay

Release 18 November
Directors Carl Boese, Paul Wegener
Cast Paul Wegener, Albert Steinrück, Lyda Salmonova, Ernst Deutsch
Distributor Eureka Entertainment
Certificate PG
Format

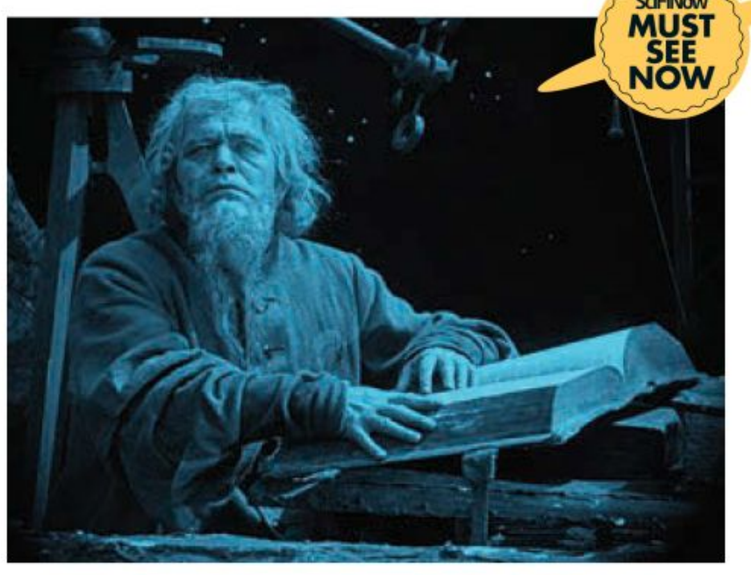


One of the earliest iconic works of horror cinema, *Der Golem* is presented here in the closest thing to a definitive version, using elements of different available prints restored in dazzling 4K (the Blu-ray also includes the shortened US cut). The quality of the footage is the most immediately breathtaking element of Eureka's new release of this; Paul Wegener's third attempt at filming the *Golem* story, but there's so much to enjoy here. Genre fans more familiar with *The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari*, for example, will appreciate it as an early work of German expressionism, with glorious sets and make-up design.

It's also a story of great resonance, as a rabbi in 16th Century Prague foresees great disaster for his people in the stars and decides to create a Golem to protect them. As the Holy Roman Emperor decides to expel the Jewish people from the city's ghetto, the Golem becomes a tool, then a threat. It may lack the eerie chills of some of its contemporaries but there's a real power to the film, and truly astounding craftmanship presented in an essential new edition.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★★



SciFiNow MUST SEE NOW



The Dead Don't Die

Y'know...ghouls

Release 18 November
Director Jim Jarmusch
Cast Adam Driver, Bill Murray, Chloe Sevigny, Tilda Swinton
Distributor Universal
Certificate 15
Format • DVD



Now that the dust has settled a little on Jim Jarmusch's none-more-deadpan meta zombie comedy, *The Dead Won't Die*, perhaps general opinion towards it will soften a little.

Sure, the film is paced so laconically that it is almost glacial and yes, the self-aware jokes do get more and more irritating as they pile up, but there is also something genuinely funny and quite powerful about the bitterness on show here in this state-of-the-world commentary.

The all-star cast is definitely having a good time and while Driver and Swinton are obviously the standouts of the movie, there are also some really good turns from the supporting players (Caleb Landry Jones is a highlight as a geeky gas station/horror memorabilia store owner).

A lot of the deadpan dark comedy also really works, whether it's Swinton capably slicing through the undead with a samurai sword or Driver's cop explaining how he's compartmentalising his panic, and there's some pretty nasty gore too.

And sure, it's all been done before but if we can't have a film being angry about us ruining the world now, then when can we? Plus, y'know, Tom Waits plays a hermit.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★★

Doom: Annihilation

Game on

Release Out now
Director Tony Giglio
Cast Amy Manson, Dominic Mafham, Luke Allen-Gale, James Weber Brown
Distributor Universal
Certificate 15
Format Blu-ray • DVD



Given that it was presumably made to hold onto the rights to the videogame franchise, it's fair to say that we approached *Doom: Annihilation* with some caution and, while it is certainly not the best DTV sequel we have ever seen, it's far from the worst.

Writer-director Tony Giglio keeps things quite simple (a security team is dispatched to a base on Mars only to find that the facility's teleportation system has let monsters through) and after a surprisingly decent start we are unfortunately then back to the familiar business of bickering badasses shooting a lot of horrible creatures along an endless series of corridors.

In fact, a little bit more ambition might have been nice here as it really starts to get repetitive around the halfway mark. The cast do their best with what they have (*Once Upon A Time's* Amy Manson is a solid lead and Dominic Mafham is having a lot of fun as the clearly evil scientist) but none of it bears particularly close inspection.

On the one hand, *Doom: Annihilation* does the job, but on the other hand it lacks the kind of mad invention that would have taken it from the bargain bin and turned it into an unexpected cult favourite.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★☆☆☆





An American Werewolf In London

Still top dog

SciFiNow MUST SEE NOW

Release Out now
Director John Landis
Cast David Naughton, Jenny Agutter, Griffin Dunne, John Woodvine
Distributor Arrow Video
Certificate 18
Format Blu-ray



Beware the moon. John Landis' *An American Werewolf In London* is nearly 40 years old and remains not only the greatest werewolf film ever, but arguably the best blend of horror and comedy. The transition between the two still dazzles as much as Rick Baker's prosthetics work (also the high watermark of the genre), and the film will still make you laugh, shiver and break your heart as poor David discovers that the thing that attacked him and his late friend Jack on the Yorkshire moors was a werewolf and that he will turn into a monster on the full moon unless he takes drastic action.

If you've never seen it, this new Arrow Video release is the perfect opportunity. The 4K restoration looks great, and it is loaded with new extras as well as several features ported over from the previous Universal Blu-ray. You've still got Paul Davis' feature-length retrospective making of 'Beware The Moon', which features interviews with all the key players, as well as the brilliant commentary by stars David Naughton (David) and Griffin Dunne (Jack).

Best of the new bunch is 'Mark Of The Beast: The Legacy Of The Universal Werewolf', another feature length doc that traces the history of the lycanthrope on page and screen with input from the likes of Landis, Joe Dante, Mick Garris and many more. There's also a new chat with Landis, and an excellent video essay from Jon Spira on the film's specifically Jewish identity.

Less essential but in tune with the general love-in are an interview with Corin Hardy and Simon Ward, who talk about their first experience watching the film, and a trip to the Prop Store with make-up designer Dan Martin to look at some of the surviving artefacts.

From the soundtrack to the little flap of skin dangling off Jack's grinning mangled face, this is a masterpiece in a lovely new edition.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★★

Eli

Save your skin

Release Out now
Director Ciarán Foy
Cast Charlie Shotwell, Kelly Reilly, Max Martini, Lili Taylor
Distributor Netflix
Certificate 15
Format NETFLIX



Originally set for a theatrical release by Paramount, *Eli*, the latest chiller from *Citadel* and *Sinister 2* director Ciarán Foy was instead given a seasonal release from Netflix and, in retrospect, it's easy to see how the movie would have be quite tricky to market.

It is a contained and fairly low-key story for the most part, about a young boy (played by Charlie Shotwell) who will die if he is exposed to any non-sanitary environment, who then travels along with his parents to Lili Taylor's mansion-style hospital for a potential miracle cure. But all is not quite as it seems…

There are, of course, some pretty big twists coming in the film but they come very late in the game. For the bulk of the running time, we instead watch Eli suffer through some painful treatments at the hospital, witness things going bump in the night and bond with a rebellious teenager (played by *Stranger Things'* Sadie Sink) who knows more than she's letting on through the window.

This is the kind of thing which would have made a great short film but it's unfortunately simply over-stretched at feature length, and while Foy delivers a big fun grand finale, it doesn't make up for the rest of the story and chances are that most casual viewers may have switched off by that point.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★☆☆☆



Gwen

Wouldst thou like to live depressingly?

Release 11 November
Director William McGregor
Cast Maxine Peake, Eleanor Worthington Cox, Richard Harrington
Distributor Bulldog Films
Certificate 15
Format Blu-ray • DVD



Set in 19th Century Snowdonia, *Gwen* successfully invokes many of the feelings it's clearly going for: claustrophobia, bleakness, sorrow… Boredom probably wasn't on the list, but it does a good job of inspiring that, too.

Like a lot of great films, *Gwen* makes you work for the payout with a slow, suspenseful build-up. But the payout here is almost non-existent. It definitely has a nasty ending (no spoilers there – it's obvious from the start), but there's not enough depth of character or story before it to make you really care about the outcome. Great performances from the cast and the intriguing production design keep the film from drowning, but those alone aren't enough to pull it from the water.

Gwen is definitely whatever the gothic Welsh equivalent of Marmite would be. Some will love the tension and bleakness, but those looking for a proper chill (or even a mild sense of dread) ought to look elsewhere. As far as its contribution to period folk horror goes, it's inconsequential compared to the bounty of offerings film lovers have been treated to this side of the millennium.

Poppy-Jay Palmer

★★☆☆☆





Nightbreed

Where the monsters live

Release Out now
Director Clive Barker
Cast Craig Sheffer, David Cronenberg, Anne Bobby, Hugh Ross, Doug Bradley
Distributor Arrow Video
Certificate 15
Format Blu-ray



Much as Aaron Boone (Craig Sheffer) finds monster kingdom Midian irresistible, there's something about Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* that's alluring to genre fans. A carnival of creatures from one of the genre's most brilliant talents that was cut to ribbons by an uncaring studio… what if there's a masterpiece somewhere out there? That thinking that led to the Cabal Cut, assembled from footage found on VHS tapes, that did a festival run a few years ago, and it finally led to Barker's director's cut.

In his filmed intro, Barker estimates that there's about 40 minutes of new footage, with 20 minutes of old stuff taken out. Does it make *Nightbreed* a masterpiece? No, to be honest, but it turns an alluring mess into a film that not only makes more sense but which shows his true vision. This isn't a slasher movie with monsters, it's about finding your place in the world. Midian may be frightening and grotesque, but it's a community with a lot more heart and soul than the cruel outside world, filled with murderous police officers and embodied by Boone's serial killer therapist Dr Dekker, played by David Cronenberg.

Dekker's role has been cut down but the film still kicks off with one of the scariest home invasions committed to film, the monsters of Midian are still beautiful, and there are some glorious new additions. However, it still feels like a story missing important parts. You'll watch it again and again, though, and it's wonderful to see it get the treatment it deserves.

The bountiful extras include a slightly anarchic commentary from Barker and restoration producer Mark Alan Miller, a cast-focused doc about how much fun they had, an interview with Barker regular Nicholas Vince, perspective-lending chats with the editor, make-up designer and second unit director, and excellent critical analysis of Barker and the film from Kat Ellinger and Kim Newman. If you've ever loved *Nightbreed*, or even the idea of *Nightbreed*, then this is essential.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★☆

Universal Soldier

The war's not over

Release Out now
Director Roland Emmerich
Cast Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dolph Lundgren, Ally Walker, Ed O'Ross
Distributor Studiocanal
Certificate 18
Format Blu-ray



For those of us who treasure memories of renting this sci-fi actioner from Blockbuster years ago, caution is advised when approaching a revisit.

There's still some enjoyment to be had from watching JCVD and Lundgren face off as reanimated Vietnam vets turned into unkillable super soldiers, but what's really surprising about Roland Emmerich's movie all these years later is just how slow it is.

It's essentially a chase movie but with most of the budget saved for the opening and ending, resulting in an awful lot of Van Damme playing benign confusion as Ally Walker's reporter marvels at his healing powers and high kicks.

On the plus side, Lundgren is a huge amount of fun as the evil Sergeant Scott once he's off the leash, and it's his darkly comic mania that keeps things interesting in the lulls. The 4K restoration comes with a lot of input from the two lead actors including two commentaries, a featurette on their rise to stardom and a brisk but honest 'making of' with frank memories from Emmerich and writer Dean Devlin.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★☆☆☆







Annabelle Comes Home

Time to put away childish things

Release 18 November
Director Gary Dauberman
Cast Madison Iseman, Katie Sarife, Mckenna Grace, Michael Cimino
Distributor Warner Bros
Certificate 15
Format Blu-ray • DVD



Ever since we got a glimpse of the demon-hunting Warrens' basement of occult oddities in *The Conjuring*, this movie has been inevitable. So here, while Ed (Patrick Wilson) and Lorraine (Vera Farmiga) are away, their daughter Judy (Mckenna Grace) finds herself in mortal peril as rebellious teen Daniela (Katie Sarife) unlocks devil doll Annabelle's glass case and invites every other monster in the Warrens' collection out to play.

It should be fun but the script is so lifeless it never gets going. Its jokes aren't funny, and its scares aren't scary – because its cast are all so young, writer/director Gary Dauberman doesn't seem willing to let anything worse than a grazed knee happen to them, which robs all his monsters of their powers because none of them can actually do anything much.

Like the creepy-but-useless Annabelle doll herself, it's all just a bit wooden.

Sarah Lines

★☆☆☆☆

Creepshow

SciFiNow MUST SEE NOW

Tales to chill the blood

Release Out now
Showrunner Greg Nicotero
Cast Adrienne Barbeau, Giancarlo Esposito, Tobin Bell, Tricia Helfer, David Arquette
Distributor Shudder
Certificate 15
Format VOD



Creepshow has been a hit for Shudder and it's easy to see why. We've all got a lot of love for the 1982 Romero/King film, and the format seemed like a winner: six 40 minute episodes, each divided into two segments. Sprinkle in a few genre favourite actors and directors like Roxanne Benjamin and David Bruckner, and *Creepshow* 2019 should be an open goal.

And, for the most part, it's a success. The series puts its best foot forward with its opening episode, nodding to its past with star-studded Stephen King short story 'Gray Matter' and bringing things up to date with Josh Malerman's adaptation of his own story 'The House Of The Head', in which a little girl realises that her doll house is haunted and begins sending in figurines in a doomed attempt to exorcise it. It's the strongest of the bunch and definitely the episode to show anyone who's unconvinced.

However, the decision to air weekly then seemed to work against them, with the second episode's 'Bad Wolf Down' (written and directed by Rob Schrab) arguably the weakest. There's nothing close to a disaster in any of the episodes but some are stronger than others. Some stories coast by on having a memorable image or a nifty hook (the folded-up imprisoned Djinn who spits out gold coins whenever he's in pain in 'The Man In The Suitcase' is the best example) and some feel over-extended even at 20 minutes ('Times Is Tough In Musky Holler' threatens to topple over by over-explaining itself).

But when it works, it really works. There's a willingness to go for the gut and get really unpleasant, and that sense of payback and mischief which was key to the original film and the comics which inspired it. A bullied younger brother finds a monstrous helper to get his own back, a businesswoman is trapped in an elevator with the corpse of her furious lover… it's classic Creepshow stuff and great popcorn viewing.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★☆

▲ Having worked on the original *Creepshow*, make-up legend Tom Savini returned to direct half of episode six.

Wonder Woman: Bloodlines

Back in action

Release Out now
Directors Sam Liu, Justin Copeland
Cast Rosario Dawson, Jeffrey Donovan, Marie Avgeropoulos, Adrienne C Moore, Kimberly Brooks
Distributor Warner Bros Home Entertainment
Certificate 12
Format Blu-ray DVD



Rosario Dawson returns to Themyscira to voice Diana Prince in DC's latest animated adventure, *Wonder Woman: Bloodlines*.

Packed with action, humour and enchanting characters, the film follows Diana, Steve Trevor and Etta Candy as they take on new threats and team up with new allies – and old favourites, including Cheetah, Dr Poison, Medusa, Silver Swan and more.

Bloodlies isn't quite as triumphant as some of the studio's other animated efforts, but it keeps things interesting with well-rounded characters and a smart script. It also has a lot to offer in terms of variety. Sometimes it's a fun romp and other times it's a family drama, but more often than not it's a delicious superhero epic.

Sure, it's nowhere near on the same scale as modern live-action comic book movies, but it doesn't need to be. It's entertaining, weirdly wholesome fodder to enjoy while waiting for the next big release. However, the film's end credits design is gorgeous, and definitely worthy of a larger screen.

Poppy-Jay Palmer

★★★☆☆

Gen:Lock Season One

Mindful mechas

Release Out now
Showrunner Gray Haddock
Cast Michael B Jordan, Dakota Fanning, Golshifteh Farahani, Maisie Williams, Koichi Yamadera
Distributor Warner Bros Home Entertainment
Certificate 15
Format Blu-ray • DVD



At first glance, Rooster Teeth's *Gen:Lock* seems worryingly easy to size up. You've got your mis-matched team, your evil invaders (The Union) intent on absorbing everyone and everything and you've got a bunch of giant badass mech suits that our heroes will have to psychically link with using the titular tech if they want to turn the tide of the war.

However, although the first episode is a little pedestrian (with the exception of the well-animated combat sequences), things really do pick up once the gang gets together and the plot kicks in. While creator Gray Haddock's love of anime is very much in evidence from the get-go, it's clear that he took away more from the likes of hallowed texts *Gundam, Ghost In The Shell* and *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* than 'mech suits are badass'.

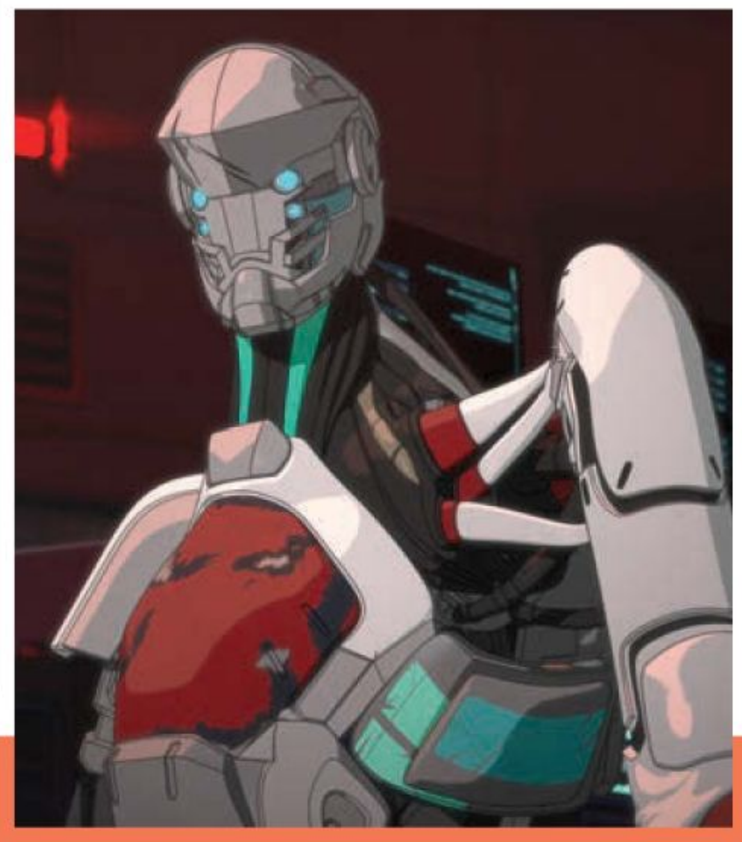
There's an interesting and affecting through line which is that the people best-suited to pilot might not be the ones who want to. Some are scarred veterans, both psychologically and physically, while 17-year old Scottish hacker Cammie (Maisie Williams) has never seen combat in her life. The time taken to actually develop these characters beyond the usual archetypes and give them complex histories is invaluable, especially as Haddock is keen to show off the tech in action whenever he can.

And then there's our lead, Julian Chase, voiced by producer and renowned anime fan Michael B Jordan. Julian is presumed KIA in the first episode but has been kept alive in a tank with his brain uploaded as the test subject for this new tech. The series continues to explore that uneasy line between life and death throughout with impressive sensitivity.

It helps that there's such an ace voice cast (David Tennant is particularly good as the Gen:Lock creator who's trying to turn this group into a team without killing them) but this really is pretty strong across the board and there's a sense of humour to stop it tipping into perpetual darkness. The plotting gets a little familiar in the latter episodes but this is a very promising first season.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★☆☆



▲ *Gen:Lock* was the first Rooster Teeth animation to be shown on television.

Swamp Thing

Greener pastures

Release Out now
Showrunners Gary Dauberman, Mark Verheiden
Cast Crystal Reed, Derek Mears, Andy Bean, Will Patton, Virginia Madsen, Jennifer Beals
Distributor Amazon Prime
Certificate 15
Format amazon





Cancelled almost immediately after it had started airing, DC's *Swamp Thing* is now available for UK viewers on Amazon Prime and begs the question: is this worth your time given that there are only ten episodes?

Well, if we're being honest, if you've been following the show's messy saga you should at least watch the pilot, which is pretty damn good. Dr Abby Arcane (Crystal Reed) returns to her hometown of Marais, Louisiana to investigate a deadly virus coming from the swamp, helped by dashing biologist Alec Holland (Andy Bean) and watched carefully by the wealthy Sunderlands (Will Patton and Virginia Madsen), who run the town. When Alec is killed, the forces in the swamp save him by turning him into a hybrid avenger…

The pre-release buzz focused on the fact that this was a horror show (co-created as it is by Gary Dauberman and produced by James Wan), and the early episodes lean into that genre. Exploding windows, people getting chased through the trees, viruses turning people into monsters and baddies being torn apart by tree limbs… it's all good stuff.

However, problems arise because this is a show that wants to do everything. It wants that gritty, R-rated feel, but it also wants that heightened small town soap opera that both appeals to a broader audience and accommodates a story in which Will Patton is dumping accelerants into a swamp for shady research purposes. The performances are mostly located in that vein, with Patton having far too much fun and only really working when sharing scenes with Madsen's Lady Macbeth figure, while Kevin Durand makes a lot of entertaining big choices as obsessed scientist Jason Woodrue.

There's so much going on that it occasionally loses sight of its title character and greatest asset. Derek Mears is wonderful as Swamp Thing: haunted, scary, sensitive and tragic, and if the show had been allowed time to settle down and pick a tone, it might have been able to match him. Instead it ends on a semi-cliff-hanger without much in the way of resolution and will remain a weird footnote.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★☆☆

REALM OF ASH

70

TASHA SURI
The author of Realm Of Ash takes us inside her dazzling follow-up to Empire Of Sand



'Darkly intricate, devastating and utterly original'

R. F. KUANG
on *Empire of Sand*

72 Book reviews
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BLOOD & DUST

We talk to Tasha Suri about her superb follow-up to Empire Of Sand: Realm Of Ash

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

Tasha Suri's fantasy debut novel *Empire Of Sand* was one of the best genre novels of last year; a tale of repressed magic and corrupted power with a compelling heroine in the gifted Amrithi-blooded Mehr. Now, Suri has returned to that world with *Realm Of Ash*.

"The series is based in a world loosely inspired by the Mughal Empire, which once ruled a significant swathe of South Asia," explains the author. "Unlike the real Mughal Empire, the Ambhan Empire of the series is full of shadow spirits, sleeping gods, and magic performed through dance. In book one it's an empire at its peak. In *Realm Of Ash*, it's an empire cursed and crumbling.

"Like a lot of fantasy settings it's a big old world, but both of the books focus closely on the perspective of women caught between two cultures: the culture of Ambhan nobility, and the culture of the Amrithi, magically gifted descendants of shadow spirits who are oppressed and exploited by the Empire. The heroine of *Realm Of Ash*, Arwa, is half Amrithi and half Ambhan, and has hidden her magical heritage all her life. After she's widowed by a nightmare-fuelled massacre, she turns to her magical gifts to find a cure for the Empire's curse."

What was more challenging about writing a follow-up?

I'm not sure if writing to a deadline was more challenging, or writing through the fear of disappointing fans of the first book. It was probably a combination of both. When you're writing in the hope of finding an agent and a publisher, you can write at your own pace. That isn't the case when you're under contract, and I was filled with the terrible fear that I wouldn't be able to finish in time. Or worse, that I would, and that all the people who had liked the first book wouldn't enjoy the second. But all you can do is get your head down and do your best. I love the story and I'm proud of it. I hope readers will enjoy it too.

We pick up with Arwa ten years after we met her as a child in the first book. How did she come about?

In many ways she was always intended to be a mirror to her sister Mehr. In *Empire Of Sand*, Mehr was proud of her Amrithi heritage. In *Realm Of Ash*, Arwa knows nothing about what it means to be Amrithi, and thinks of her magical heritage as a curse. But Arwa is also a lot more than Mehr's mirror. She's a jaded, cynical and furious widow, shaped by the loss of her sister and her husband, and the slow crumbling of the Empire. I feel like the minute I sat down to work on *Realm Of Ash* with a vague idea about plot and character, she turned up fully-formed and dictated what happened from then on. Sometimes, as silly as it sounds, characters don't wait for you to bring them about. They barge in and do it themselves.

There's a lot of discussion from characters about how Arwa should be feeling and behaving. How much fun was it to have her fight back?

Ooh, it was a lot fun. And cathartic. I think there are very few people in the world who haven't been told to fold themselves into smaller and smaller boxes over the years. There are ways we're expected to look, behave, be, feel, that are often at odds with the people we have the capacity to be. Or maybe that's just me. But I doubt it, somehow. I think we all have a monster with sharp teeth sitting in our chests. Arwa's life is unusually restrictive, and allowing her the chance to find her true self – allowing her to experience the ugly, difficult journey towards the truth – was a vicious joy. I hope it's as cathartic for readers.

What were you looking to explore with the political world and situation at Ambha?

There are few – if any – sites of power in the world that haven't built their strength on the exploitation of others. Do we have a right to want to save a system or empire that consumes other people in order to ensure our wellbeing? Can we love a nation like that? Should we? How does existing in that kind of world damage you? And what can we replace it with? These are massive, thorny questions, and I don't pretend I'm smart enough to have any answers, but I wanted to consider how Arwa and Zahir would find their own path through the thorns.

The Empire's prosperity comes with a high price... did you enjoy exploring real-world issues through genre?

Yes. I love that genre allows you to deal unapologetically with big sweeping concepts like empire, good, evil, mortality, monarchy. And I love that you can tell grand stories or intimate stories, tell tales of wish-fulfilment or tear apart those dreams. Genre can be very subversive and transformative and political. It can also be, at times, regressive and support the status quo – which is a political choice too, of course. But by and large, it feels like an exciting time in genre, full of compelling voices saying something new about us and about the world we live in.

Finally, is there anything that you would recommend readers who enjoyed the *Books Of Ambha* should read or watch next?

If you'd like to watch some Bollywood films that have a flavour of the Books Of Ambha, you can never go wrong with the classic *Mughal-e-Azam*. If you like your Bollywood a little more modern, *Bajirao Mastani* is great – very sweeping and romantic. As for books – I assume you've all read *City Of Brass* by SA Chakraborty, right? (Of course you have, it's wonderful.) I also highly recommend *The Candle And The Flame* by Nafiza Azad, a gorgeous story of strong women, djinn and the Silk Road.



Realm Of Ash by Tasha Suri is available now from Orbit Books.

INTERVIEW

Tasha Suri



© Shekhar Bhatia

BOOK CLUB
Realm Of Ash

Realm Of Ash

Dust to dust

Release Out now
Writer Tasha Suri
Publisher Orbit
Price £8.99

Picking up roughly ten years after the events of *Empire Of Sand*, Tasha Suri's *Realm Of Ash* is a dazzling sequel that has the same epic scope and intimate feel, and feels much more confident in its storytelling. This follow-up is the story of Arwa (Mehr's younger sister who we met as a child in *Empire Of Sand*), who arrives at a sanctuary for widows following the death of her military commander husband. She alone escaped the terrible massacre of Darez Fort and her new companions have a lot of questions about how exactly she managed to do that…

Arwa isn't telling, because she has the same Amrithi blood as her sister and knows that her gifts could see her executed as a heretic if word got out. But when she realises that there is no running from the daiva creature that is determined to follow her, she decides to use her abilities for the good of the Ambhan Empire, travelling to court to assist the bastard Prince Zahir in his secret experiments to uncover the root cause of the curse that grows ever closer and ever more deadly.

As the two become closer and grow to trust each other, two outsiders venturing into the realm of ash and the memories of the dead, their situation in the waking world becomes ever more precarious. The Emperor is dying, and the battle for succession will put them both in grave danger.

More than the time jump, the big difference here is the perspective. Arwa sees her gift more as a curse, something to hide until it can be put to use for the greater good. However, this in no way means that the character is a pushover. For a significant chunk of the book, especially early on, characters are constantly telling her how to act, how to comport herself, and how she should be feeling as a new widow.

Suri shows the rage and frustration boiling away in this woman who does not want to be pushed to one side, who wants to be of use and who knows that people would be scared of her if they knew what she is capable of.

The Mughal-India inspired setting is still fascinating and beautifully rendered and Suri has a great deal of fun with the back-biting and scheming that accompanies any good battle for succession. But it's the truth behind the Empire's previous good fortune, and how that discovery impacts Arwa, that really hits home in this story.

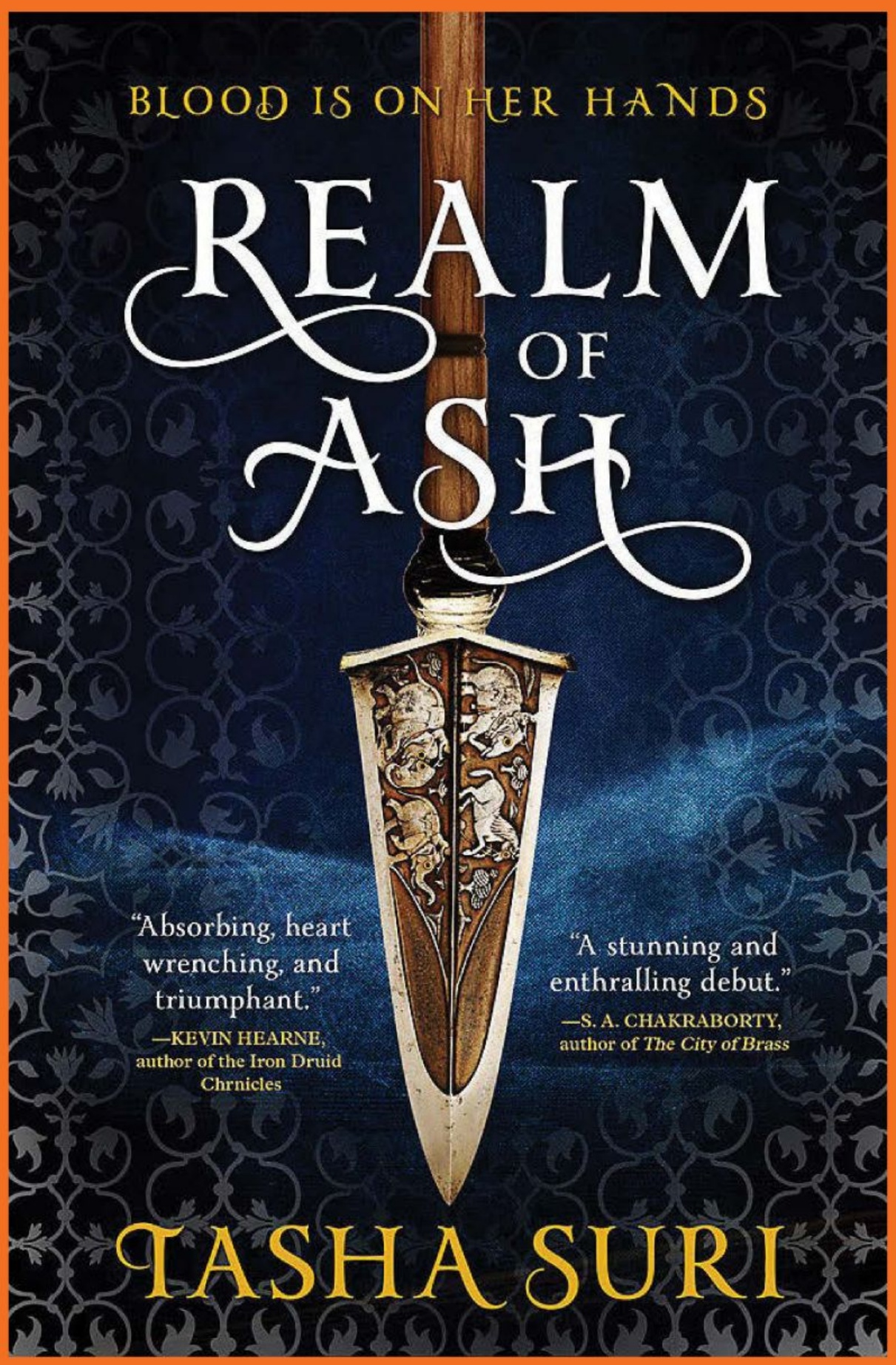
There are grisly and tragic secrets waiting for her in the realm of ash that will make her question her assumptions and beliefs about her heritage and her sister, and the rising tide of violence and madness is vividly portrayed in sequences that border on horror.

As strong as the mythology and world-building is, Suri is just as interested in her characters. Arwa and Zahir's blossoming relationship, built on a mutual respect and trust, is genuinely affecting and often funny. Their honesty is a rarity in this world, and Suri's supporting cast includes a host of strong, intelligent women who tell Arwa they shouldn't be trusted even if they can be.

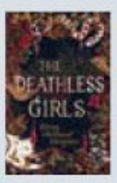
Highlights include pragmatic court veteran Gulshera, calculating princess Jihan and terse guard Eshara, helping to create an uncertain and gripping world for a superb follow-up fantasy.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★☆



YOUR 5... NEXT READS



The Deathless Girls
"A YA take on the brides of Dracula - very much into the idea of going into that world but from a different angle! #BookClub" **@SarahDobbs**



The Graveyard Book
"Desperate to reread Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* for Halloween! #BookClub" **@PasmineJalmer**



The Institute
"*The Institute* by Stephen King. #BookClub" **@mark280smith**



Alien: Prototype
"Next up for me is *Alien: Prototype* by @timwaggoner which should keep me busy until *Resistance Reborn* by @RoanhorseBex arrives. #BookClub" **@Rozza1210**



My Dead And Blackened Heart
"by Andrew Freudenberg, an excellent collection of quiet and extreme horror. #BookClub" **@GNHorror**

Tell us what you're reading on Twitter or Facebook

Doing Time

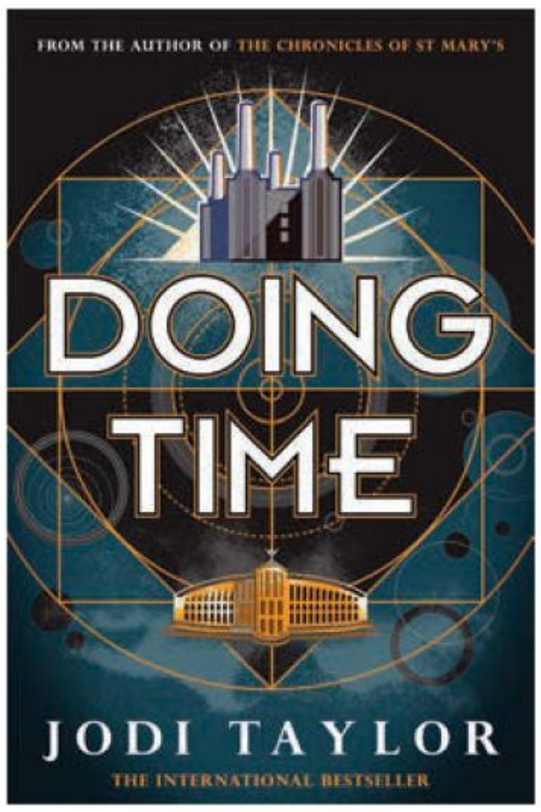
They will be watching you…

Release Out now
Writer Jodi Taylor
Publisher Headline
Price £18.99

Think too hard about the idea of the Time Police – a specialist force that is dedicated to stopping people illegally travelling in time and disrupting the course of history – and you will give yourself a headache. So it's probably for the best that the tone of this novel is pretty lightweight.

A spin-off of author Jodi Taylor's *Chronicles Of St Mary's* series, *Doing Time* follows three new and thoroughly unsuitable recruits to the force.

There's rich playboy Luke Parrish; awkward and shy Jane Lockland; and quirky genius Matthew Farrell (whose temporally tangled backstory will be familiar



to *St Mary's* fans, but doesn't really play into anything here).

The three of them comprise Team Weird: shunned by the rest of the Time Police for their unorthodox approaches to cases and, well, just because they're quite antisocial.

However, they will need to figure out how to work together if they want to survive. Because someone's trying to bring down the Time Police from the inside, and Team Weird look like they might be very convenient scapegoats…

Episodic in structure, *Doing Time* necessarily spans centuries, but while there's some fun to be had in seeing how the trainee time cops interact with ancient Egypt and Caesar's Rome, it all also feels a bit obvious.

There are a lot of characters to keep track of throughout the novel, so when the baddies are eventually unmasked, the reveal doesn't have too much impact. And while Lockland makes for a sympathetic protagonist, Parrish reads like a bad parody of an over-privileged, over-sexed socialite, and Farrell's involvement is so minimal he barely makes a dent on the narrative.

For readers already invested in this universe, this offers an interesting glimpse into the world of the much-disliked Time Police. But it's not a great starting place for anyone else.

Sarah Lines

★★★☆☆

The Red Scrolls Of Magic

An American warlock in Paris (and Vienna, and Rome)

Release 9 November
Writers Cassandra Clare and Wesley Chu
Publisher Simon & Schuster
Price £7.99

Magnus Bane has always been Cassandra Clare's greatest creation. In all of her *Shadow World* stories, the centuries-old, bisexual, cat-eyed warlock stands out as the most interesting character – and sometimes, the only interesting part of the books, full stop.

So perhaps it was inevitable that he'd eventually get his own spin-off trilogy. *The Red Scrolls Of Magic* is the first of three planned Magnus-centric books, but unfortunately, it makes for a seriously underwhelming start.

Set concurrently with the events of *City Of Fallen Angels*, the fourth of the original *Mortal Instruments* series, this book sees Magnus head off on a tour of Europe with his new Shadowhunter boyfriend Alec Lightwood (if none of this means anything to you, this book isn't for you). But they don't get to enjoy Magnus' detailed romantic itinerary, because they're constantly interrupted by demons. Someone's got a vendetta against Magnus, and there's also a nasty rumour going around the Downworld that he founded a murderous cult that's trying to resurrect a Prince of Hell.

Annoyingly, though, because this story takes place in an established timeline, nothing has any consequences, killing all sense of urgency or suspense. Much of the plot relies on lost memories, a device Clare comes back to over and over again – and despite the presence of a credited co-writer, it's still very much in her trademark florid style. There are cute moments, but even



those rely heavily on a pre-existing affection for these characters.

Even if you are already a fan, it's just a little bit too sugary, making the reading experience feel like binge-eating sweets. Afterwards, all you are left with is a headache and a vague feeling of dissatisfaction. Sorry, Magnus, even you haven't got enough magic to make this book worth reading.

Sarah Lines

★★☆☆☆

YOUR READS

What have you been reading this month?



"Almost halfway into *Moon* by James Herbert. Different to some of his others- less gore though not a subtle ghost tale either. #BookClub"
@ParsonsFiction



"*Paper Girls Vol 1.* Another great series by Brian K Vaughn. #BookClub"
@Jbarnes532



"*From Byfleet To The Bush,* the autobiography of Jacqueline Pearce, Servalan from *Blake's 7* and many other things (including Hammer Horror). It's not the kind of thing I normally pick up but it's a very good read. #BookClub"
@JonnBlanchard



"Just finished *Ormeshadow* by Priya Sharma from @torbooks Big fan of novellas and this is a wonderful example of the form. #BookClub"
@Rozza1210



"*Artemis* by Andy Weir. And I'm enjoying it. Feels like it could be real, which I enjoy in SciFi. #BookClub"
@ChrisHatch

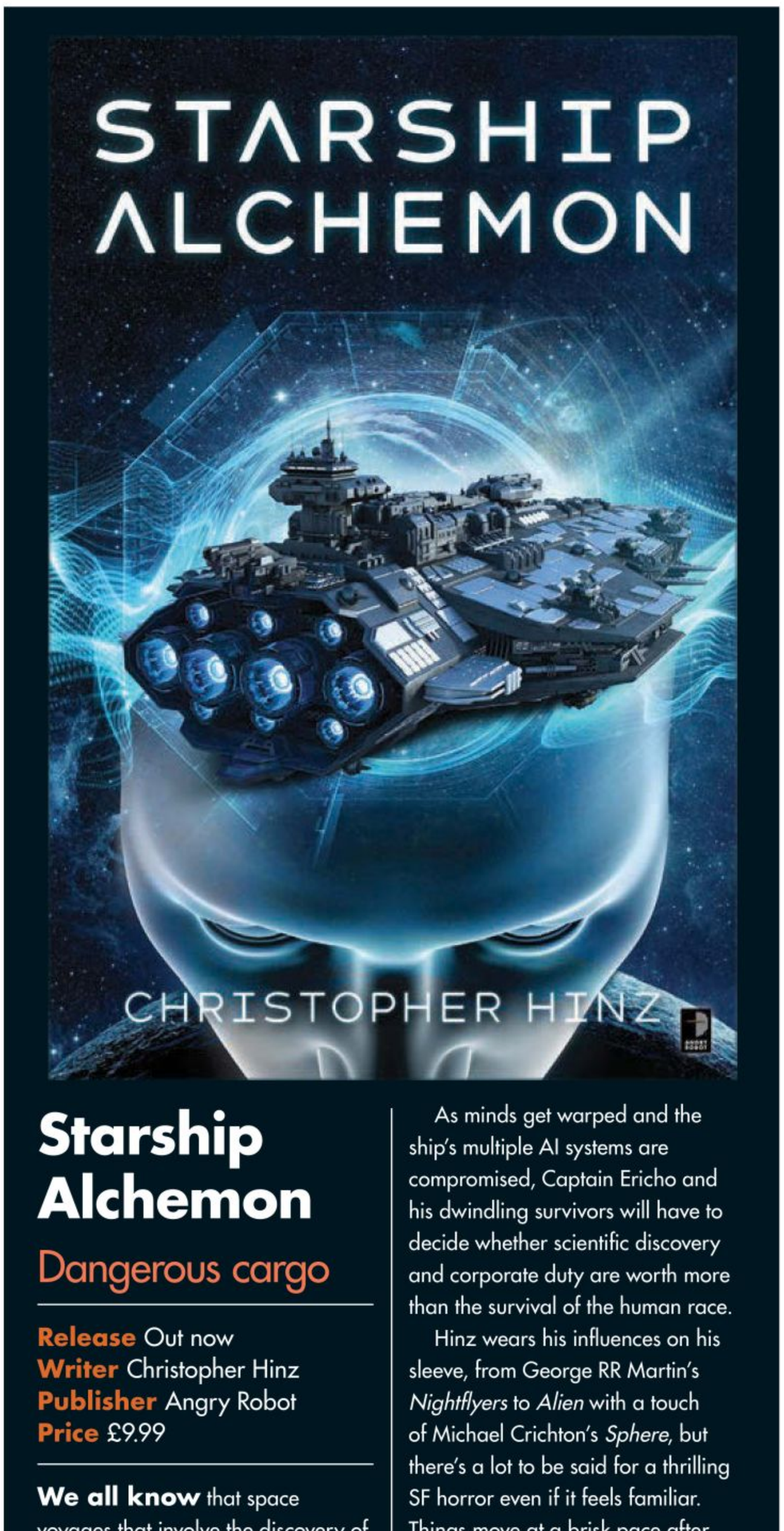


"Just done all of @PhilipPullman's *#HisDarkMaterials* trilogy and about an hour left of *#BookOfDust.* Thought I'd re-read (re-listen) them again before the show comes out... #BookClub"
@BPCVFX



"*House of Spines* by @michaelJmalone1. A modern day gothic ghost story. Very atmospheric and creepy. Nearly finished and loving it. #BookClub"
@Bcallar67

Tell us what you're reading on Twitter or Facebook



Starship Alchemon

Dangerous cargo

Release Out now
Writer Christopher Hinz
Publisher Angry Robot
Price £9.99

We all know that space voyages that involve the discovery of an impossible organism on a distant planet never go well, and author Christopher Hinz is clever enough to know that we know that. Of course, that's not good news for the crew of the Starship Alchemon. The small team, made up of blue collar workers, scientists, a psionic (psychic) and a 'lytic' (who spends his time plugged into the ship for maximum efficiency), also have the misfortune of working for a sinister corporation. So when things start going wrong after bringing the aforementioned and awakening organism on board, there are many possible explanations as to why and for what purpose.

As minds get warped and the ship's multiple AI systems are compromised, Captain Ericho and his dwindling survivors will have to decide whether scientific discovery and corporate duty are worth more than the survival of the human race.

Hinz wears his influences on his sleeve, from George RR Martin's *Nightflyers* to *Alien* with a touch of Michael Crichton's *Sphere*, but there's a lot to be said for a thrilling SF horror even if it feels familiar. Things move at a brisk pace after clunky but necessary exposition and the characters are smart enough to know they're in a lot of trouble.

The story is most exciting at its midway point when the chaos starts, and while the ending is mostly satisfying there are some obvious notes and missed attempts at humour. However, for the most part there's a nice dark wit to the story and characters that you care about, and while it may not be breaking new ground, it's a lot of fun.

Jonathan Hatfull

★★★★★

The Lost War

What are you fighting for?

Release Out now
Writer Justin Lee Anderson
Publisher King Lot Publishing
Price £12.99

When The Lost *War* begins, the battle should be over. There's a tenuous peace, but the kingdom of Eidyn is still on fire with demons and zombie-esque Reivers roaming around, and the threat of dark magic and the influence of the imprisoned draoidh, Mynygogg, is lurking just out of sight.

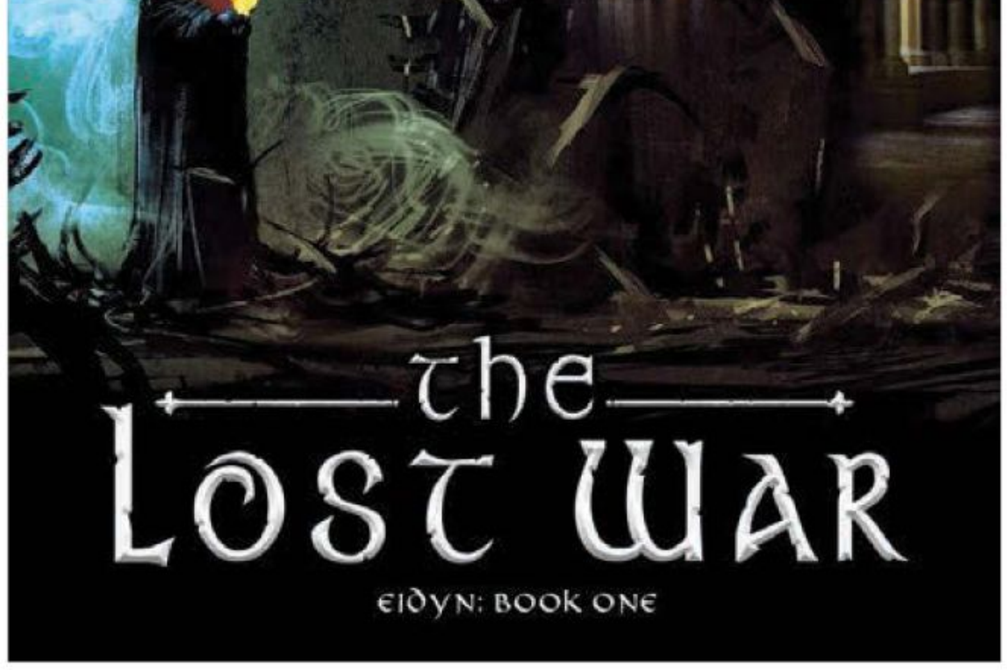
So when Aranok, the draoidh who helped secure the peace and serves as King's Envoy, is told by his master to take a carefully chosen team to escort an exiled foreign queen across country, it's easier said than done. Especially when they discover that things are a lot worse outside the city walls…

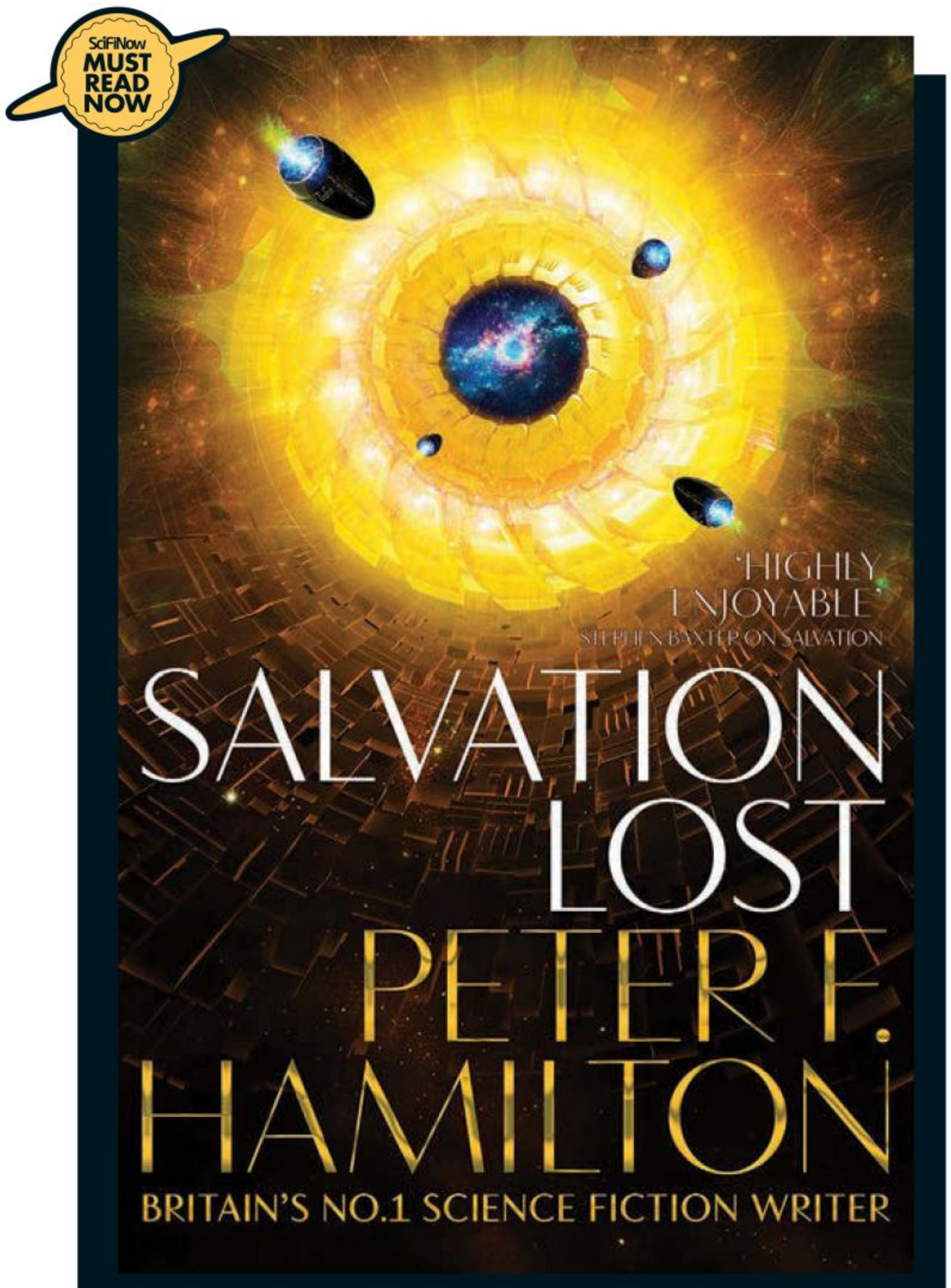
This epic fantasy, the first in a new series by Justin Lee Anderson, settles into a compelling and entertaining rhythm from early on. Once the team is established and Aranok's group is joined by a kind monk and his gifted bodyguard Samily, the author alternates between exposition and action. The latter is inventive and fun, as various monsters arrive to throw up roadblocks. The former threatens to grow repetitive from a structural point of view but is tempered by the fact that the author has written complex, haunted characters, each of whom has a past they're running away from and each of whom grows to see a reason for joining a mission greater than themselves.

The Lost War is an easy world to get lost in and we're excited to see where Anderson takes us next.

Tom Ives

★★★★★





Salvation Lost

How the world ended

Release Out now
Writer Peter F Hamilton
Publisher Macmillan
Price £20

Salvation Lost picks up where its predecessor finished. In the 23rd Century, the Olyix have begun their invasion of humanity, hoping to harvest humans for their religious quest to the end of the universe. In the future, what remains of humanity is still fighting against the Olyix, dealing with the ramifications of those trying to save humanity back in the 23rd Century.

In the 23rd Century, Peter F Hamilton grants us a look at an alien invasion in real time, using various perspectives to show the different reactions of those experiencing it. There are people watching it unfold on TV, dispassionately betting on how long city shields would last. Or people who rekindle relationships in the face of the end of the world. It all feels deeply human and individual, even if morality might be an issue.

The structure of the book allows Hamilton to play around with the irony inherent in the future-based storyline. There are references back to the characters in the earlier timeline and the decisions made with the knowledge they might not be around to see their benefits. But just when you think that you might know how those decisions will play out, Hamilton offers up a surprise.

It's that unpredictability that makes *Salvation Lost* a success. The Olyix might be driven in their quest to meet their god. They might be unstoppable. But the humans of *Salvation Lost* no doubt have some tricks up their sleeve for the final instalment of the trilogy.

Becky Lea

★★★★½

Skein Island

Spinning a yarn

Release November 20
Writer Aliya Whiteley
Publisher Titan Books
Price £7.99

Before she is attacked, Marianne receives an invitation to spend a week at the famous Skein Island resort for women. There, she'll be expected to make a declaration, a story that is for her to write and no one else to read. Or so she thinks.

Aliya Whiteley's quiet prose is perfect for the slowly unfolding narrative. There's a simplicity that gives it a domestic feel initially, before the scope expands to Skein Island. The domesticity is tied to the title and the idea of spinning a 'yarn'. A skein is a length of yarn, ready to weave. And what are novels, but a collection of threads?

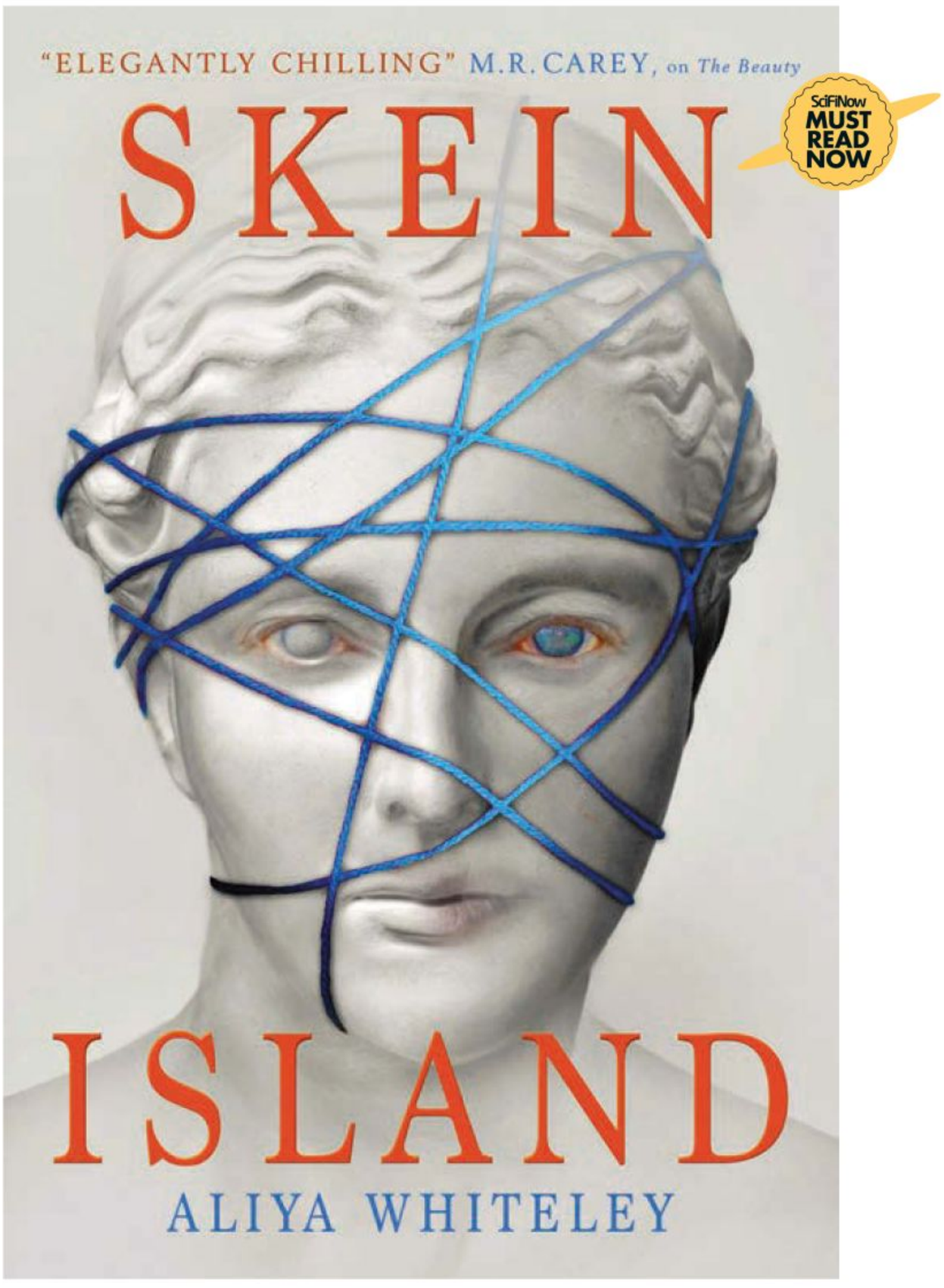
Whiteley takes Marianne's story and weaves it into a large tapestry (puns intended) of other tales, where male archetypes rule and women are reduced to objects.

It is clever in its construction, spinning out from the attack on Marianne at the beginning. There's a clear villain in her attacker and her husband David wants to be the hero. But where does that leave Marianne, who should really be at the centre of her own story?

In a world where the way we construct stories and who gets to tell them is a constant question, *Skein Island* examines that question and places it within a historical, classical context. There's a balancing act between exploring that philosophy and crafting a compelling narrative, but Whiteley handles it with a steady finesse.

Becky Lea

★★★★★



BOOK CLUB
Gallery

OTHER WORLDS THAN THESE

The Folio Society gives four genre classics a glorious new treatment

WORDS **JONATHAN HATFULL**

JUST IN TIME for your Christmas gift list, The Folio Society has announced four beautiful new editions of four very different genre classics. There's Jin Yong's glorious wuxia epic *A Hero Born*, the first instalment in his record-breaking series. Following its editions of *The Left Hand Of Darkness* and *A Wizard Of Earthsea*, Folio has tackled another of Ursula K Le Guin's greatest novels with *The Dispossessed*. There's Diana Wynne Jones' beloved fantasy *Howl's Moving Castle* (adapted into a film by Studio Ghibli), and a beautifully bold new edition of *The Phantom Of The Opera* by Gaston Laroux.

Each of these novels are distinctly different but each plunges the reader into a gloriously vivid, bewitching world, and each comes with beautiful artwork.

A Hero Born, which follows a young hero's rise in 13th Century China, comes with an introduction by the brilliant Ken Liu and features illustrations by Le Yuling, while 1974's *The Dispossessed*, split between the rival planets of Anarres and Urras, gives artist David Lupton another chance to visit Le Guin's world after illustrating its edition of *A Wizard Of Earthsea*.

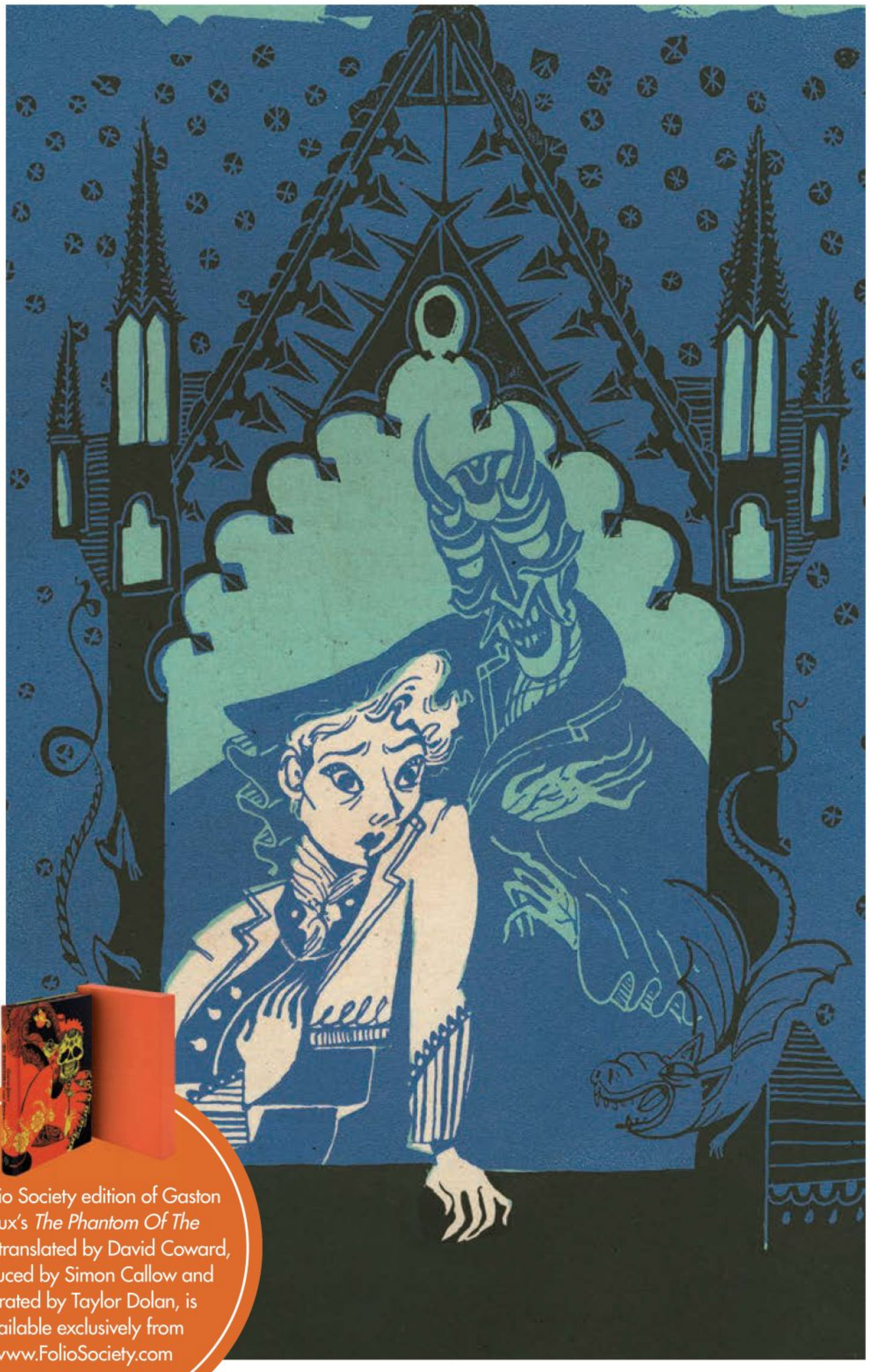




Illustration ©2019 Taylor Dolan from The Folio Society edition of *The Phantom Of The Opera*

The Folio Society edition of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom Of The Opera*, translated by David Coward, introduced by Simon Callow and illustrated by Taylor Dolan, is available exclusively from www.FolioSociety.com

Illustration ©2019 Taylor Dolan from The Folio Society edition of *The Phantom Of The Opera*

Illustration ©2019 Le Yuling from The Folio Society edition of *A Hero Born*



The Folio Society edition of Jin Yong's *A Hero Born*, introduced by Ken Liu and illustrated by Le Yuling is available exclusively from www.FolioSociety.com

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The Phantom Of The Opera is illustrated by Taylor Dolan, who provided images for each chapter opening as well as seven colour illustrations, and an introduction from the mighty Simon Callow, and *Howl's Moving Castle*, introduced by author Marcus Sedgwick, is illustrated by Marie-Alice Harel, who was selected from over 500 entries to bring the story of young Sophie, and old Sophie, to life.

Martial arts epics, socio-political SF, undying theatricality and bewitching fantasy… this is a wonderful and eclectic new genre section from The Folio Society and each is an absolute treat.



Illustration © Marie-Alice Harel from The Folio Society edition of *Howl's Moving Castle*

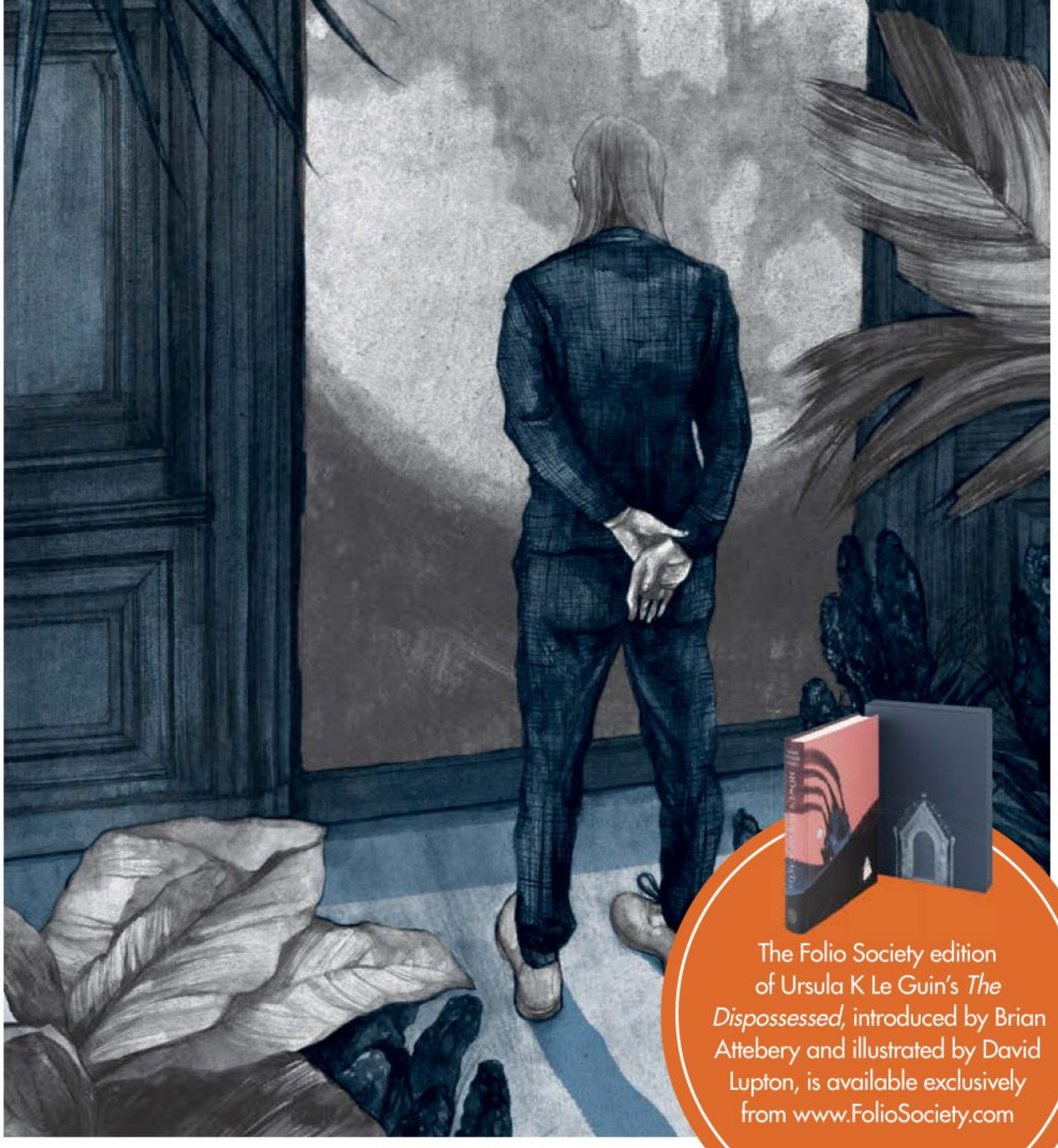


Illustration © Marie-Alice Harel from The Folio Society edition of *Howl's Moving Castle*

The Folio Society edition of Ursula K Le Guin's *The Dispossessed,* introduced by Brian Attebery and illustrated by David Lupton, is available exclusively from www.FolioSociety.com



Illustration ©2019 David Lupton from The Folio Society edition of *The Dispossessed*

The Folio Society edition of *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones, introduced by Marcus Sedgwick and illustrated by Marie-Alice Harel, is available exclusively from www.FolioSociety.com

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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO

JAWS

NO OTHER FILM HAS EXPLORED THE DEPTHS OF UNDERWATER TERROR AS EFFECTIVELY AS JAWS. WE CHART THE LEGACY OF THE FRANCHISE

WORDS **OLIVER PFEIFFER**

"The great fish moved silently through the night water, propelled by short sweeps of its crescent tail. The mouth was open just enough to permit a rush of water over the gills. There was little other motion: an occasional correction of the apparently aimless course by the slight raising or lowering of a pectoral fin..."

The emotionless, unstoppable monster of the deep vividly depicted in Peter Benchley's opening to his novel *Jaws* still has the power to chill nearly half a century on. But if producers Richard D Zanuck, David Brown and director Steven Spielberg had only known the difficulties that awaited them in attempting to bring that visceral threat to the silver screen, it would undoubtedly have prevented one of the greatest movies from ever being made.

Actor Richard Dreyfuss appeared to have had an uncanny premonition when he said to Spielberg: "Well, this sounds like it's going to be a great movie. I'd rather watch this movie than make it, because it's going to be a bitch to shoot!" after the, then 26-year-old filmmaker offered him the part of young ichthyologist Matt Hooper after several high-profile actors had turned it down.

Even with all the melodrama concerning extramarital affairs and the mafia was appropriately jettisoned from Benchley's book, Dreyfuss' foreshadowing wouldn't be an exaggeration, particularly when it came to bringing that colossal 25ft mechanical beast to life in the water.

"We wanted to shoot in the real ocean not in a tank with a phony backdrop," recalls *Jaws* production designer Joe Alves to **SciFiNow**. "But the ocean was terrible and infiltrated the electronics of the shark, so when the shark stopped working, salt water got into the mechanisms, which resulted in breakdowns."

Alas every FX specialist in Hollywood advised that it would take a good 18 months to build the shark properly, so Alves anticipated there would be sufficient time for his team, (led by special effects maestro Robert A Mattey, who had built the giant squid for *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*) to construct it. "However, when the book came out the studio wanted to capitalise on the momentum of its success [and brought the production forward] which ultimately gave us less than five months to make the shark!" laments Alves. "As a result we lost a year testing and preparing it."

Luckily for Susan Backlinie, who specialised in water stunts and memorably embodied skinny-dipping shark victim Chrissie in that legendary opening scene, there was no mechanical fish to contend with. "Spielberg told me that he wanted the audience under ⇨

Fourth of July takes a turn in Amity...



JAWS

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All the jump scares still work beautifully.



THE INDIANAPOLIS MONOLOGUE

A brilliant collaboration between uncredited *Jaws* co-scribe Howard Sackler, writer-director John Milius and actor Robert Shaw, Quint's deeply haunting retelling of the shark-devouring true life aftermath of the USS Indianapolis (following a light-hearted and drunken sing-along and a macho scar comparison) is unsurprisingly Steven Spielberg's favourite scene in the whole movie.

Sackler's idea (which didn't actually feature in Benchley's original book) was to add some depth and history to Quint's shark-hating sensibility. So Milius turned Sackler's initial paragraph proposal of the idea into a mammoth nine-page treatment, which Shaw then, in turn, modified for his incredible scene-stealing 15-minute monologue in the film.

The famous scene was then seamlessly spliced together from an initial drunken first take and a more soberly performed second one.

their seats with their popcorn when that scene was over!" she tells *SciFiNow*. "I think they planned on having a shark but it wasn't working and I think it came off better. If they showed the shark right off the bat it would've ruined the movie."

To achieve the bloodcurdling effect of being mauled by a shark, six men on the beach pulled Backlinie back and forth on cables that she was attached to beneath the water. "When we were looping the scene on a sound stage, I had a bassinet in my lap and Spielberg poured water down my throat and I would scream," she continues. "Richard Dreyfuss came in while I was doing that and said, 'oh God that's terrible!' and left!"

There's still a degree of debate as to whether the shark's rampant malfunctioning resulted in its belated appearance or if it was a shrewd suspense tactic right from the start. Alves believes it was always planned that way. "Steven didn't want to overuse the shark," he tells us. "We used the barrels, [during the shark-hunting climax] not because the shark wasn't working, but for more of a Hitchcock mystery thing; when you see the barrels, that's where the shark is. In my original storyboards, which reflected what the shark was capable of, you'll see we got all the shots we wanted."

Nevertheless, real shark footage, captured in South Australia by underwater cinematographers Ron and Valerie Taylor, was interspersed. The husband and wife team behind the 1971 shark documentary *Blue Water, White Death*, were also consulted on the movement of the mechanical fish, (now affectionately named 'Bruce' after Spielberg's attorney). "We sent them some footage and Valerie said: 'The shark looks really good but you don't have to move it as much,'" elaborates Alves. "'When it's swimming, don't wag the tail too much or the head, just relax the movement.' So, that's what we did to try to make it look as real as possible."

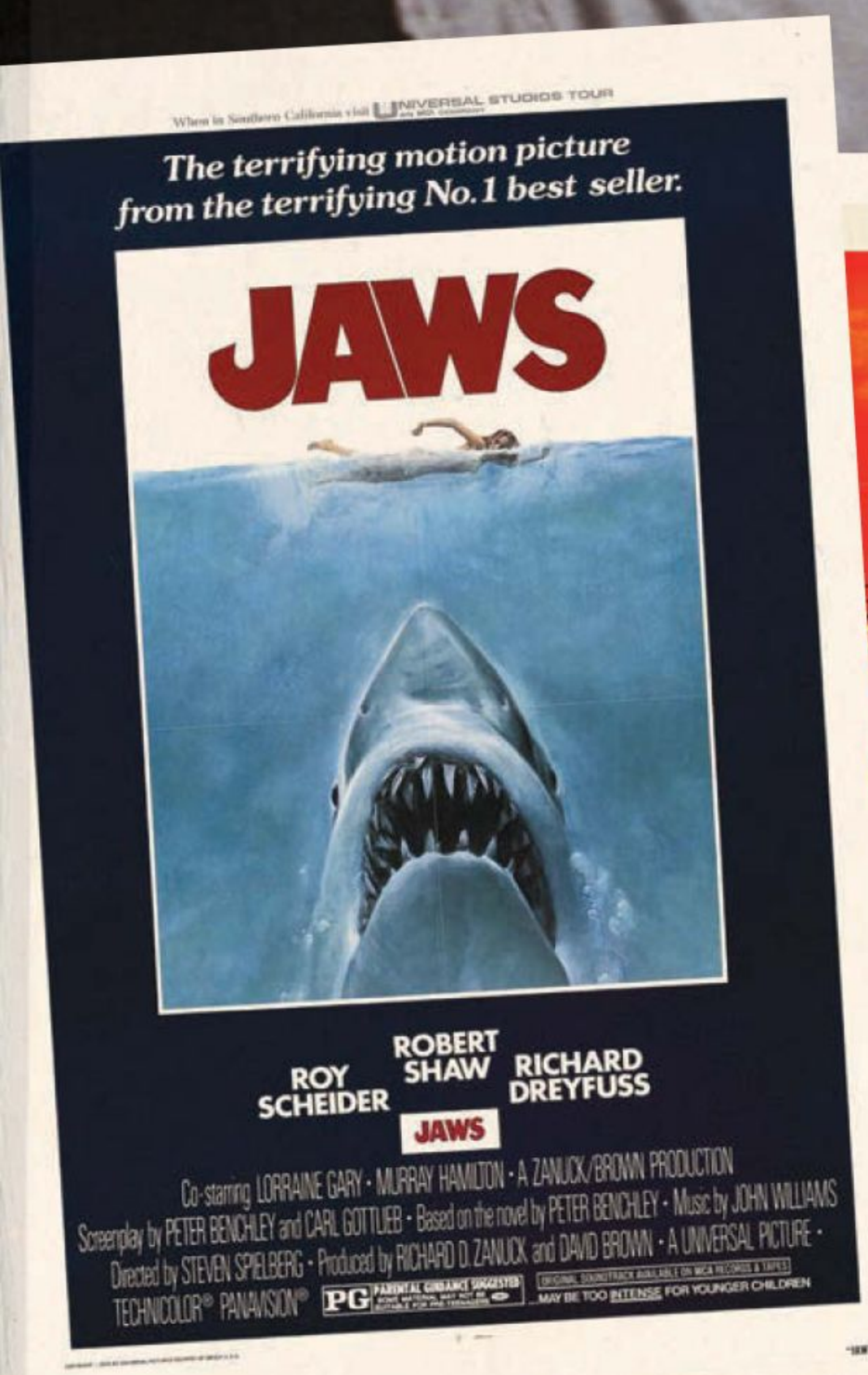
The Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard was specifically chosen for the central fictional sea resort town of Amity. However, it wasn't selected simply for its pristine picture-postcard façade. It was the only east coast location that felt appropriately cut off, where the crew could sail 12 miles out to sea and still have a sandy bottom 30ft below the water's surface for the shark to function. Yet, the unpredictable and

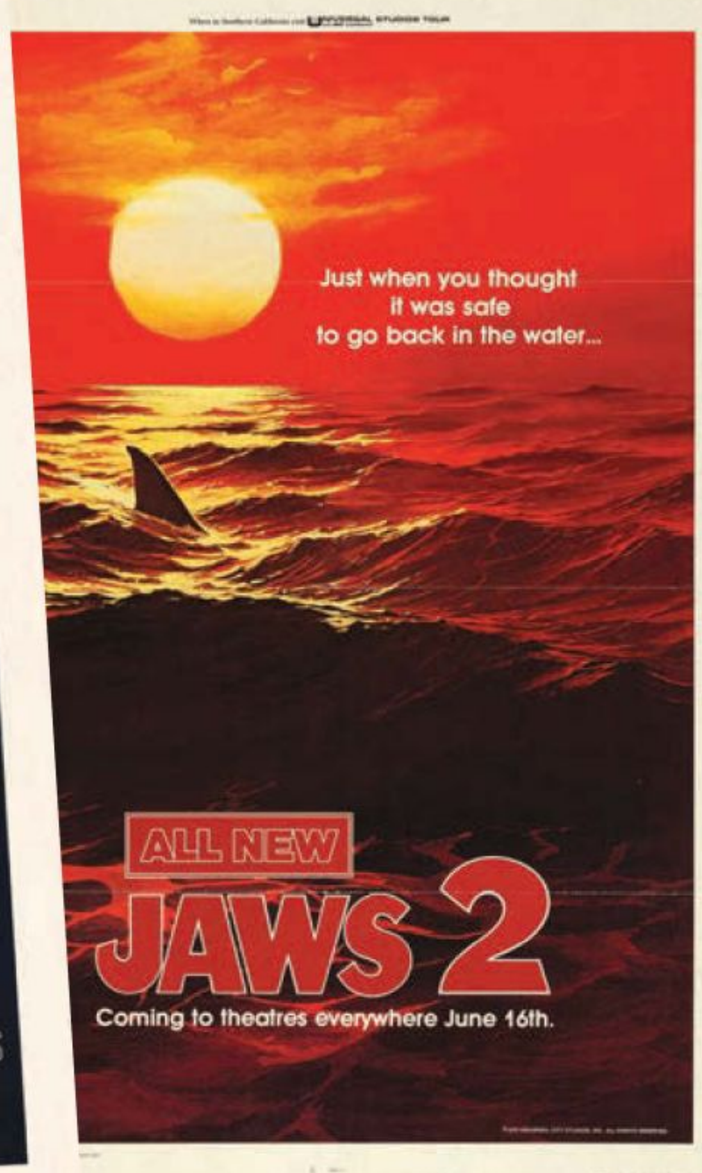


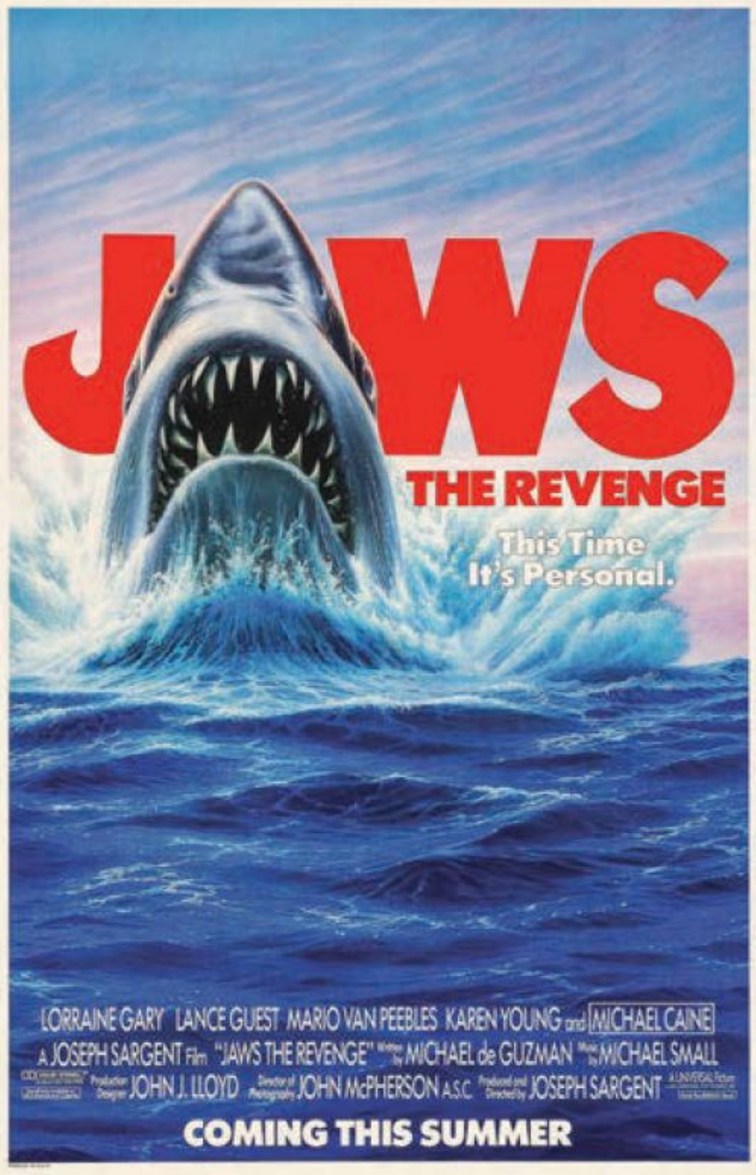
time-consuming conditions of working in the ocean for the shark-hunting climax put insurmountable strain on second unit. "Some days it would be calm, other days it could get really rough and we also had an incredible amount of boat traffic," confirms Alves. "Steven wanted it to look completely isolated [out there], but it was the height of the regatta season so we had to send boats out to ask people to sail out of our view... it just created any number of problems."

Downtime allowed greater emphasis on conversational scenes that encouraged an improvisational approach to Carl Gottlieb's punchy rewrite of the screenplay. There was also plenty of time to perfect the celebrated USS Indianapolis monologue (see box out) that gave Quint (Robert Shaw) the backbone to his shark-hunting character. In addition, Quint's vessel, the aptly named Orca, was an existing boat that was heavily modified by Alves to properly reflect the character's grizzled sea-faring personality. "Steven said: 'We've got to give [the boat] more character,' so I made a lot of changes, making the windows bigger, adding a crow's nest, painting it dark and totally changing the boat to reflect Quint," Alves remembers.

But it was local police chief Martin Brody (Roy Scheider) who Spielberg clearly wanted audiences to closely identify with. In the best tradition of the 'everyman', he's a flawed protagonist, not initially courageous and ironically one who has an aversion to water, but who ultimately stands up and becomes the reigning hero when he single-handedly defeats the creature of the deep in the nail-biting man versus shark showdown. ➪









JEFFREY KRAMER ON LENDING SUPPORT TO JAWS

Actor-turned TV-executive producer Jeffrey Kramer portrayed Deputy Hendricks in the first two *Jaws* movies. He talks about his unique connection to the franchise.

Tell us about securing the part of Hendricks.
My mother was born on Martha's Vineyard and I learned about *Jaws* from the local paper. I flew to Boston as my agent got me a meeting with 'Steven', as he was known back then. There were no readings, I just sat with him and he talked to me. I left thinking: 'I'm going to get this!' which is a feeling I never have. Ten days later I get the call.

Hendricks memorably discovers Chrissie's washed up remains on the beach. Tell us about filming that?
Steven's eye is so interesting. When I blow the whistle and [Brody] comes down, it was a long long tracking shot. It was also the first day of principal photography and I was so nervous I could've thrown-up!

How did you contribute to the film's improvisational approach?
I came up with my line: 'What's the matter with my printing?' Also waving to Brody [throwing stones] at the window to get my attention and I pretended I was afraid of heights when I got up to paint the shark out of the billboard.

You returned for *Jaws 2* in an expanded part. What was that like?
I had quit because the original director John Hancock had cut my part in half and gave another [actor] all the funny lines. However, after Jeannot Szwarc came on board he said: 'Where's the guy who played the original deputy? I liked him!' So, they called me back and got rid of the other actor.

What's your theory on *Jaws'* success?
I spent my life in TV and developed *The X-Files*... and the reason TV is fun is because it's all about character. You don't go back every week to see the story. You know what the characters are going to do. You go back because you love watching them do it. In many ways, the success of *Jaws* is because the shark didn't work. They had to rely on character. You've got to hand it to Zanuck and Brown: they pulled millions out of the ocean without even getting wet!

All the blood, sweat and tears paid off when audiences lapped up the thrilling nautical adventure to record-breaking receipts at the box office. Spielberg later attributed half of *Jaws'* success to legendary composer John Williams, with the looming presence of the largely submerged shark implied by the now iconic dur-dun theme that did far more to install primal fear in audiences' minds than any hydraulic creature of the deep could.

Nevertheless, the shark would become the unapologetic star when he returned for the 1978 sequel that rather ingeniously teased: 'Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...' and was set four years after the original. "We must show the shark a lot!" stipulated *Jaws 2* director Jeannot Szwarc, who was supported in this strategy by the studio who believed the physical shark was the primary reason for the success of *Jaws*. Szwarc's reasoning was that you wouldn't be able to recapture that element of shark surprise accomplished in Spielberg's original. Thankfully, the shark worked this time...

"On *Jaws 2* we really had it working and it worked a lot!" claims Alves who, in addition to returning as production designer, served as second unit director, (having notably shot the gut-wrenching Alex Kintner shark attack from *Jaws*) along with taking an associate producer credit. "When I started [they] came up with all these crazy ideas that the shark would come up and spin around so Bob Mattey made it much more complicated."

It's the numerous scenes of shark attack activity, along with the built-in suspense factor carried over from the original movie, that admittedly give this sequel a fun and thrilling 'slasher movie' vibe. Perhaps the most remarkable of which is when the predator attacks a rescue helicopter or when a young Keith Gordon, (playing one of the hapless teens) is thrown into the water after the shark smashes into his small dingy tipping it over entirely. "I said to Keith, 'just get out there and have fun!' I didn't tell him the shark was coming," reveals Alves. "So, he was performing his scene, reacting to the



Less is more doesn't really work in sequels.



The plot for *Jaws: The Revenge* is ludicrous.



other kids and then I instructed [the crew] to bring the shark up. It came up, hit the boat and knocked it over. It was a shock for him because he didn't know the shark was coming but we completely nailed it!"

Achieving the climax, where Chief Brody defeats the shark by inserting an uprooted power cable into its jaws at the appropriately named 'Cable Junction' island, proved to be problematic and was reportedly achieved on the final hour of the last day of production.

"The tricky thing was [this] floating island had to be built because a natural island tappers underwater which wouldn't allow us to get the shark close enough as it was attached to a rig," Alves reveals. "We had one of those storms that you get in Florida that blew the fiberglass rocks apart, so the entire island had to be rebuilt. It was really difficult to achieve that one shot and to get the cable and timing correct but it worked out pretty good."

Thrilling shark action, solid performances and the welcome return of John Williams as composer make *Jaws 2* a guilty pleasure and a satisfying follow up to Spielberg's classic. It subsequently became one of the most profitable sequels ever.

To take the onus off the demands of a third instalment, Joe Alves had a potentially ingenious idea that would boldly proclaim: 'The third dimension is terror!'

"Verna Fields told me: 'They were going to do this thing called '*Jaws 3 People O*', which is going to make fun of the people who made *Jaws*,'" recalls Alves, regarding a conversation he had with the Oscar-winning *Jaws* editor, affectionately known as 'mother cutter'. "Then this television producer, Alan Landsburg, got the rights to *Jaws 3* and she said to me: 'Why don't you go and talk to him and see if you can save the franchise!'"

> ""CAN THIS 3D WORK UNDERWATER?' 'WE DON'T KNOW""
> RUPERT HITZIG

Having undertaken 85 days of second unit directing on *Jaws 2*, Alves felt he was qualified enough to sit in the director's chair this time around. After being impressed by an underwater 3D film that he saw at a sea park, Alves took the concept further and pitched an immersive 3D shark movie. "I was extremely impressed with the depth of being underwater, with the seaweed and a shark coming out and I thought: 'What about '*Jaws 3-D?*', which will get everyone excited."

Rupert Hitzig come onboard as a producer but was initially reluctant to do a *Jaws* sequel until he had a meeting with Universal President Sid Sheinberg and realised the movie would be attempting this new dimension in terror. "I said to him: 'That sounds like a challenge. When do you want it?' and he said: 'Next 4 July' and I said: 'Can I read the script?' He said: 'We don't have one.' 'How about the cast?' 'We don't have any!' 'Can this 3D work underwater and is there a system that works?' 'We don't have it. We don't know!'" Hitzig tells *SciFiNow*.

Jaws 3-D's evolving story would ultimately concern a mammoth 35ft shark let loose in the confines of SeaWorld Orlando that enacts revenge for the death of its young in captivity. The decision to set events in a theme park was done for budgetary reasons, in an attempt to make aspects controllable and avoid problems experienced on the previous films. Fortunately, SeaWorld was only too happy to oblige. "The script wasn't finished but they'd read the premise and considered it a bit of a boom for them and felt it would attract more tourists," continues Hitzig.

Despite the initial hiring of Richard Matheson to pen the first draft, problems were already gestating on the production of *Jaws 3-D*. "I almost got the exact same phone call

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that I'd gotten on *Jaws 2* which was: 'Can you drop what you're doing and come on location and rewrite as we're having problems with the script?'" recalls Carl Gottlieb, who visited the set and got to work revising the problematic shooting script. "It had exclamation marks and lines drawn through scenes which said 'we can't do this!' or 'can we fix this or make this better?' Landsburg thought he could do it on the cheap!"

Just like he'd achieved on the original *Jaws*, Gottlieb attempted to evoke humanity and humour into proceedings. Specifically, he worked on the camaraderie between the Brody brothers, in addition to installing younger sibling Sean with an aversion to water that relates back to the previous film.

A young Dennis Quaid was cast in the lead role of Mike Brody, who's now employed as an engineer at SeaWorld. To play his younger brother Sean, future filmmaker John Putch beat a roll call of young Hollywood talent to the part, including Eric Stoltz. "It was a huge get for a 22-year-old kid actor," he tells *SciFiNow*. "I don't know why I got the part but I did well in the reading and then they paired me up with Lea Thompson. Before I knew it I was shipped off to Orlando for three months to get involved in the big franchise!"

But despite the controlled sets and a shark that largely worked this time, it wouldn't be plain sailing, particularly when it came to mastering the 3D technology. "They kept saying: 'We have to get the convergence calculations right!'" continues Putch. "[3D consultant] Chris Condon was constantly measuring and saying things like: 'You can't raise your hand up in the foreground in this take because the distance from your face and the camera will triple!' So, there were a lot of restrictions, which I'm sure was a problem for them in post."

"As you watched the dallies your eyes would go left and right following the [point of convergence] and then you'd put your hands over your eyes and think 'oh that hurt!'. So, I put a sign up that read: 'Just when you thought it was safe to open your eyes: *Jaws 3-D*!'" laughs Hitzig.

Three-dimensional highlights include an underwater opening title sequence with a shark-mauled fish head lingering eerily close followed by triumphant title credits. Other 3D effects include the severed arm aftermath of the shark's first victim, a mini-submarine navigation through SeaWorld's underwater lagoon, various reptiles leaping out of the screen and an explosive shark climax where the creature's mammoth gums hurtle toward the audience!

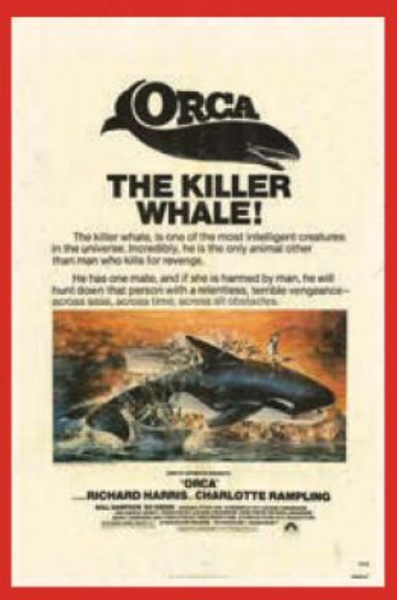
Apart from exploding shark gums, probably the most striking aspect of *Jaws 3-D* remains its ambitious production design that imagines a vast underwater kingdom, with glass observation tunnels affording spectators the sight of exotic creatures of the deep. Unfortunately the 3D climax, where the great white sluggishly smashes through the control room window, remains somewhat underwhelming. "I wanted the shark to come out at the audience but as soon as the dorsal fin hit the frame the shark stopped. So, I was disappointed I didn't get the shark any further into the audience," laments Joe Alves. "When I think about *Jaws 3*, I think about the frustration of not having final cut and not being able to do so much good stuff."

Nothing could prepare audiences for *Jaws:*



A third dimension didn't quite pay off.

5 BEST JAWS RIP-OFFS



ORCA: THE KILLER WHALE (1977)

The audacity of Dino De Laurentiis trying to replicate *Jaws* with a killer whale! However, Bo Derek's leg-severing scene is still tough to watch and Ennio Morricone's score is something to marvel.



PIRANHA (1978)

Once lined up to helm the ultimately discarded parody *'Jaws 3 People O'*, Joe Dante directed what Spielberg claimed was his favourite *Jaws* rip-off, where the predators' teeth are as sharp as John Sayles' satirical script.



RAZORBACK (1984)

The Aussies had fun with the formula too, with a ginormous animatronic wild boar threatening the Outback and Bill Kerr in the grizzled hunter role. The inspirational MTV visuals are a scream too.



DEEP BLUE SEA (1999)

What's not to love about this fun thriller that isolates scientists on an underwater facility with genetically modified mako sharks. And the (spoiler!) Samuel L Jackson death scene is still a shocker!



PIRANHA 3D (2010)

Opening with Richard Dreyfuss singing 'Show Me The Way To Go Home' and sipping 'Amity beer' before a bloody demise, Alexandre Aja clearly had fun with the killer piranha antics.





Dennis Quaid, seen here in 2D.



The Revenge, the slippery 1987 franchise finale, which hilariously proclaimed: 'This time it's personal!'

"We tried something that evidently came out of a little bit of a desperation to find something fresh to do with the shark!" late director Joseph Sargent claimed in a 2006 interview. "We thought, well what if we take a mystical point-of-view and go for a little bit of... magic, we might find something interesting enough to sit through."

Sargent's idea was a sequel-of-sorts to Spielberg's *Jaws*, where an offspring from the original demolished shark is out for revenge, and somehow manages to swim from Amity all the way to the Bahamas to intercept the vacationing Brody bunch!

Martin Brody was to be killed off during the opening Amity shark attack, but when Roy Scheider refused to return, the grim reaper came for youngest son Sean (Mitchell Anderson) instead. A fatal heart attack brought on by 'the fear of the shark' conveniently explained his absence.

Jaws series veteran Lorraine Gary returned, this time in the lead as the now widowed matriarch Ellen Brody, who can sense the shark's looming presence and believes it has a vendetta against her family (in Hank Searls' novelisation a vengeful witchdoctor is controlling the shark!). Michael Caine features as Ellen's bohemian seaplane-pilot love interest, while the role of Michael Brody went to *The Last Starfighter* himself Lance Guest.

"I knew I was going to be a marine biologist and that we were going to [film] the entire thing in the Bahamas, which sounded awesome," Guest admits to *SciFiNow*. "Besides the premise, which was a little weird, the script itself wasn't so bad and tended to be character-driven. [However], the action shots of the shark in the script ended up being different to what they could actually shoot and a bunch of scenes were moved around. They didn't really explain that to us."

Audiences would certainly be scratching their heads too, come the woefully edited and bonkers exploding shark climax, which was in fact a hasty reshoot after the original ending that saw the shark bloodily impaled by a boat's prow, tested badly with American audiences. Legend has it the reshoot prevented Caine from collecting his best supporting Oscar for *Hannah And Her Sisters*. But it wasn't simply the ending that was a shambles. The special effects by Henry Millar, (who deservedly won a Golden Raspberry for 'worst visual effects') reached an all-time low too, with the hydraulics powering the cumbersome shark contraption clearly visible, particularly in an infamously BBC-televised 4:3 open matte version.

"Everything about *Jaws: The Revenge* was so mind-bogglingly ridiculous that I remain surprised by how easily we can be seduced by personal needs and fairy tale wishes," Joseph Sargent admitted to a radio show in 2013, a year before his passing. "I have to tell you, we were all well-grounded professionals, who had dealt with all kinds of script problems [before] but we never questioned the absolute lunacy of that premise!"

A considerable low point for all involved, *Jaws: The Revenge* nailed the coffin tight on Universal's shark franchise and over 30 years later is still considered one of the worst movies ever made.

What perhaps the sequels hadn't fully realised was that *Jaws* became a trend-setting summer blockbuster because it probed into a very primal fear, presented us with relatable human characters that we truly cared about and took us on a thrilling ride that literally captured our imagination by favouring tension and suspense over surprise. Less shark was indeed more.

Jaws 1-4 are available on Blu-ray from Universal Pictures.

TOM CRUISE

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

BRAD PITT
STEPHEN REA
ANTONIO BANDERAS
AND
CHRISTIAN SLATER

GEFFEN PICTURES PRESENTS

A FILM BY NEIL JORDAN • TOM CRUISE • BRAD PITT • STEPHEN REA • ANTONIO BANDERAS AND CHRISTIAN SLATER

"INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE" KIRSTEN DUNST VAMPIRE MAKEUP AND EFFECTS BY STAN WINSTON EDITOR MICK AUDSLEY PRODUCTION DESIGNER DANTE FERRETTI

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PHILIPPE ROUSSELOT MUSIC COMPOSED BY ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL CO-PRODUCER REDMOND MORRIS SCREENPLAY BY ANNE RICE BASED ON HER NOVEL

DOLBY STEREO DIGITAL

PRODUCED BY STEPHEN WOOLLEY AND DAVID GEFFEN DIRECTED BY NEIL JORDAN

SOUNDTRACK [illegible] RECORDS

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FLASHBACK

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

TO CELEBRATE THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RELEASE OF INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE, WE SPEAK TO DIRECTOR NEIL JORDAN ABOUT THE MAKING OF THE FILM, AND ITS LEGACY

WORDS SIMON BLAND

"Anne Rice wrote vampires as credible creatures and real living beings," says director Neil Jordan, recalling his time spent with the troubled undead whilst creating 1994's big-screen adaptation of Rice's acclaimed 1976 novel, *Interview With The Vampire*.

"She removed all of that Hammer Horror, tongue-in-cheek stuff – it was marvelous. I just wanted to make the best version of her book that I possibly could." 25 years on, it's clear that Jordan's transformation of Rice's text from the page to screen marked a key moment in the visual history of cinema vampires. Gone was any trace of neck-biting campiness - and in its place was a down-to-earth credibility that only a director like Jordan (who had previously helmed grounded indies like *Mona Lisa* and *The Crying Game*) could bring.

The story's gothic depiction of unrepentant night creature Lestat de Lioncourt (Tom Cruise) and his cursed-with-a-conscience apprentice Louis de Pointe du Lac (Brad Pitt) explores a wide variety of issues relating to existence, each through a dark lens. From humanity and barbarity, right down to the bloody point of it all, Rice dances with the macabre as her ageless antiheroes endure the challenges of eternal life. "I'd heard about the book for years but I'd never read it," Jordan tells us. "I read Anne's script, then the novel itself and I just fell in love." With his interest piqued, the director asked to take his own pass on a script Rice had already penned in order to polish a few of its more human themes. "Guilt," admits Jordan on what initially drew him in. "I loved the way Anne isolated Louis' sense of eternal guilt. It was extraordinary. He was half-human and half-vampire but he never quite lost his human element and perspective," he adds. "That's what I liked about it and that's what I tried to do the movie about."

With his vision set, Jordan's first task was casting his perpetually youthful leads. With hindsight, it's hard to imagine anyone other than Cruise and Pitt donning the 18th century threads of Lestat and Louis - however back in 1994, both fans of the novel, and Rice herself - had other plans. "There were all these fans who had their own idea of who Lestat could be," remembers Jordan. "There were a host of names mentioned for that role, among them Daniel Day Lewis and Rutger Hauer. I saw Lestat in Tom in everything but his height. Anne's conception of Lestat was a tall, blonde, Nordic type," he reveals. "Tom was a teen idol at the time but he could do far more than that. It also struck me that his own situation in Hollywood – being this enormous star, yet living in gated privacy, was not too dissimilar from the way Lestat was described and I felt there was some correlation between movie stardom and vampirism - movie stars strive to be eternally young and mysterious. I thought Tom was an extraordinary actor and could do something with this role that we hadn't seen him do before," says Jordan. "It was a risk - but one that was really worth taking."

As for Cruise's co-star, the role of Louis required some emotional heavy-lifting: "I met ⇨

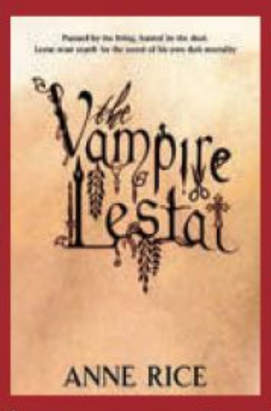


Cruise was the perfect Lestat.

FLASHBACK
INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

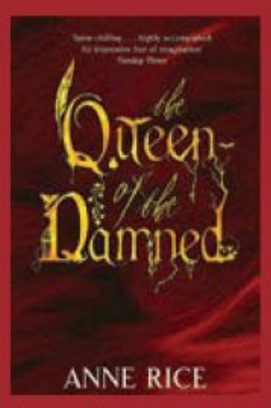
LONG LIVE LESTAT

Interview With The Vampire isn't the only outing for Lestat. Author Anne Rice has made him the star of a number of her novels. Here's a few of his most notable appearances...



THE VAMPIRE LESTAT (1985)

The follow up to *Interview With The Vampire* and the second instalment of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* series puts Lestat centre stage as he tells his long and on-going life story; from his humble beginnings as French nobility in the 1800s, to his time spent as the frontman of a San Francisco rock band in the 1980s.



THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED (1988)

Picking up directly after *The Vampire Lestat,* Rice reunites us with her immortal villain-turned-rockstar to deepen her take on ancient vampiric lore. In 2002, the role was passed to actor Stuart Townsend in director Michael Rymer's eponymous big-screen adaptation.



PRINCE LESTAT (2014)

Considered by Rice as an official follow up to *The Queen Of The Damned, Prince Lestat* sees the neck-biting antihero drawn out of his self-imposed exile to help restore order to the now-chaotic world of vampires. The character has since appeared in 2016's *Prince Lestat And The Realms Of Atlantis* and 2018's *Blood Communion: A Tale Of Prince Lestat.*

with Brad and he loved the script," continues Jordan. "I could see that it would be his story and the emotions of the movie would be the emotions of Louis. Brad had to suffer that role, in a way," he explains. "Shooting at night really got to him and the fact that he was giving a portrait of guilt... it went into his brain. I thought he was marvelous."

Despite Jordan's confidence in his leads, the feverish fandom surrounding Rice's horror classic still made itself known in a rare example of pre-internet backlash. "We were shooting and I was in a bar one night. A girl comes up to me and says: 'Why did you cast Tom Cruise as Lestat?' I said: 'Because I think he's going to be great' and she said: 'No, no', pulled up her dress and showed me a tattoo of Rutger Hauer on her thigh as Lestat. I thought, okay, that's how insane the admiration for this book is, let's prove them wrong."

Lestat and Louis weren't the only bloodsuckers brought to life in Rice's novel. *Interview With The Vampire* also helped introduce the world to the talents of a young Kirsten Dunst, whose powerhouse performance as the devious and wronged child vampire Claudia cemented her status as one-to-watch. "We tested a lot of young actors," says Jordan on finding Dunst. "What struck me about Kirsten was she was already a practiced actor. She must have only been about ten but she was just extraordinary. She ripped through those scenes. First of all, I thought 'okay, this person can play the role without a doubt' but not only that, I thought this person has acting in their soul."

With his primary cast set, there were a few all-important details that Jordan and the film's make up team – led by the late, great Stan Winston – had to decide upon to ensure the credibility of their pragmatic vamps. "The first thing you have to do with a vampire is work out where the teeth are," smiles Jordan. "If you look at F W Murnau's *Nosferatu*, he put the teeth right in the centre, like a rat, which is kind of chilling and weird. In the traditional Hammer vampire movies, the teeth were where our teeth are. We did tests – teeth in the middle, teeth at the side..." he says, recalling how they landed on the canine-tooth placement used in the film.

"The next thing we had to do create a sense of veins. I wanted their faces to have the veins underneath showing through, like they're not entirely human and the skin had become too thin," he explains. "I'd just had a child and kids love to hang upside down. I'd noticed how their veins would pop when they did that, so I said to Stan, let's try to get this vein look on the actors – so we hung Tom Cruise and



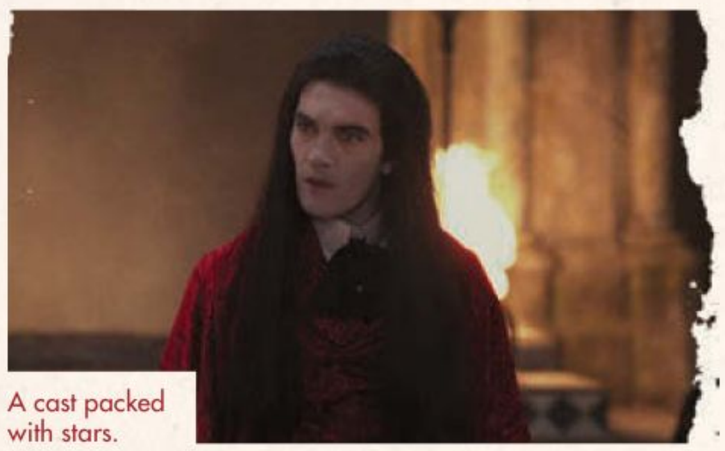
Kirsten Dunst amazed.



It's a beautiful historical epic.







A cast packed with stars.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

Despite the glossy finished product, *Interview With The Vampire* was not without its fair share of production problems. Four weeks before shooting was due to start, cast member River Phoenix, who had been lined-up to play Louis' interviewer Malloy, passed away suddenly following a tragic drug overdose outside LA nightclub The Viper Room.

"It was a real shock because we were just about to start," says Jordan in reflection. "Poor River. It was a tragedy for his whole family. He would have been amazing." The role of Malloy ultimately went to Christian Slater.

However with film featuring two of the Nineties hottest stars, the trouble didn't stop there, as paparazzi flashbulbs threatened to invade the set. "We were helped by the fact that we were shooting at night, which drove us all insane but it kept us out of the public view," says the director. "We could control the paparazzi, keep them out of sight and create this little bubble in which we made the movie."

"I WAS ALLOWED TO MAKE IT THE WAY I MAKE INDEPENDENT MOVIES"

NEIL JORDAN

Brad Pitt upside down and traced their veins. We traced them gently on their faces and it gave this extraordinary effect. Poor Tom and Brad – every time they came into work, they had to hang upside down for 20 minutes – but to me, these vampires had to look as if they actually existed."

Shooting primarily in New Orleans, Jordan worked closely with production designer Dante Ferreti to create a crumbling, forgotten world befitting of his out-of-time protagonists. "It was a unique opportunity because Warner Bros gave me a large budget to make a movie that was half historical epic, half vampire epic. Vampire films had always been rather cheap kinds of things," suggests Jordan. "It was a portrait of New Orleans, America, Europe and that 18th century world of elegance and decay – but seen entirely through the eyes of people who live at night," adds the director on the film's visual tone. "Anne presented this vision of 18th century New Orleans, like a corner of Paris or Rome stuck in this swampy jungle. It was also a lovely opportunity to travel through time and take it right up to the 20th century" admits Jordan. "What would it be like to live in the 18th Century and see the world change? What would it be like to be stuck in your own generation but around you everything changes? Every single thing in the movie came from the book."

Despite early skepticism from both Rice and fans alike, Jordan's *Interview With The Vampire* was warmly received by critics following its 1994 release. The director's faith in Cruise and Pitt paid off, too – so much so that Rice found herself compelled to write a lengthy open-letter review of the movie, praising Jordan and renouncing her previously negative thoughts surrounding Cruise as Lestat.

"It was a totally unique situation," says Jordan, looking back. "I was given as big of a budget as Hollywood gave at the time and a unique project – and I was allowed to make it the way I make independent movies – but with two of the biggest stars in the world at that time. It was weird and wonderful...

"Audiences loved it and more importantly audiences of the book loved it – but I think in the end, the most important thing was that Anne Rice liked it because that's all I was doing. I was trying to convey onto the screen the emotional heart of the feeling I got when I read that book. There's a lot of luck involved with filmmaking to make a great movie. A lot of things have to fall into place that are out of your control, and with *Interview With The Vampire* they did fall into place, and they fell into place quite well, I think."

Neil Jordan's *Greta* is available now on DVD, Blu-ray and Digital Download. *Interview With The Vampire* is available on Blu-ray.

If you're not back by midnight... you won't be coming home!



A SIMCOM PRODUCTION
LESLIE NIELSEN • JAMIE LEE CURTIS IN "PROM NIGHT"
SCREENPLAY BY WILLIAM GRAY • STORY BY ROBERT GUZA, JR.
PRODUCED BY PETER SIMPSON • DIRECTED BY PAUL LYNCH

PROM NIGHT

FLASHBACK PROM NIGHT

IN SUMMER 1980, FRIDAY THE 13TH WAS NOT THE ONLY FRANCHISE-SPAWNING, MONEY-MAKING SLASHER SUCCESS TO HIT AMERICAN CINEMAS...

WORDS **CALUM WADDELL**

Slightly lost to horror film history is the fact that the slasher boom proper was largely instigated by the box office success of two films and, surprisingly, *Halloween* (1978) is not a part of this conversation.

In actual fact, the John Carpenter classic – as a low budget independent shocker with comparably thin distribution – took its time to roll out nationally in the United States (a campaign that was gradually bolstered by excellent critical notice). This is the reason why it was the best part of two years before fans began to see any comparable austerity horror aimed at a teenage audience and featuring a knife-wielding psychopath.

As such, it would be a pair of plasma-packed pot-boilers that set the much-loved slice and dice craze into first gear as the Eighties kicked off. The first, of course, was the opening instalment of the Voorhees family saga, *Friday The 13th*, which on a budget of just over $500,000 made almost $60 million, and the second was *Prom Night,* a cheap and cheerful Canadian-produced creeper that notched up $15 million on a slightly higher production budget. The two films also played within just a few weeks of one another.

Starring Jamie Lee Curtis, *Prom Night* indicated that the market was rife for masked-maniacs and sudden, surprise set-pieces – and it was shortly afterwards that fans began to get an influx of small-town massacres on the big screen as a result...

"We shot *Prom Night* in Toronto during the summer of 1979 and in a real high school," remembers William Gray, the film's screenwriter whose genre credits also include the supernatural classic *The Changeling* (1980). "Jamie Lee Curtis is a great person and she really wanted to do this – she saw that it was going to be a hit, even though I was really sceptical. She was big news at the time because of *Halloween* but that was not even in my mind when I did *Prom Night.* I was actually ripping off *Carrie* – that is where most of my ideas came from [laughs]. It is interesting because we thought we were doing something very different from *Halloween* – mainly due to the fact our killer was a mystery until the end – but then *Friday The 13th* came out and beat us to it..."

Although Curtis is commonly pegged as the ultimate, virginal 'final girl' thanks to her portrayal of Laurie Strode in the first *Halloween*, her part in *Prom Night* sees her as the most coveted teenager in high school – and she is also clearly and unashamedly sexually active. In addition, she gets her very own disco-dancing scene (which has aged terribly). In the meantime, however, her friends are being picked-off one by one via a balaclava-wearing wacko, whose motives are hinted at during an opening prologue which takes place six years before the events of the main narrative...

"The director of *Prom Night* is a great guy called Paul Lynch, who had worked as an art director out in Toronto and who I think is still really underrated," continues Gray. "Paul wanted to make a horror movie and he had this idea for a story that involved a murderer who ends up at a high school prom. And he had been developing it for a while when he hit on the idea of a fake newspaper cover to get interest. He mocked one up and it basically said: 'Mass murder at a prom! Masked man arrested!' and it looked genuine – it looked as if this was a real newspaper and this was before people could just Google to find out if it was kosher [laughs]. I remember that he showed it to a couple of producers ⇨



Jamie Lee Curtis returned to slashers.

PROM NIGHT: FILM BY FILM



PROM NIGHT (PAUL LYNCH, 1980)
A good leading performance from Jamie Lee Curtis gives this surprisingly talky Eighties slasher staple a little more life than many of its closest cousins from the era. The mandatory slasher scenes range from overwrought (a lengthy chase around a deserted high school seems to go on forever) to brilliantly bloody (a conclusive beheading). Unlike *Halloween*, this goes to great lengths to kill its murderer at the end – making a sequel a strange proposition…



HELLO MARY LOU: PROM NIGHT II (BRUCE PITTMAN, 1987)
Carrie-inspired supernatural shocks abound in this excellent in-name-only successor. *Hello Mary Lou* is the best of the *Prom Night* franchise and one of the finest and most underrated late Eighties horror movies (really – you need to see this film). This is also the episode that introduces Mary Lou Maloney, a villainous spectre from the Fifties who possesses and slaughters the students of Hamilton High in the present day.



PROM NIGHT III: THE LAST KISS (RON OLIVER, 1989)
The second *Prom Night* was an accidental classic and cheap production values damage this comedy sequel (this is the only sequel which follows on from a previous movie). On the plus side, actress Courtney Taylor as the new Mary Lou Maloney is suitably sexy, although this distinctly average splatter-packed entry went direct-to-video with minimal fanfare.



PROM NIGHT IV: DELIVER US FROM EVIL (CLAY BORRIS, 1992)
Depressingly ditching the Mary Lou storyline altogether, this returns the franchise to the concept of a killer stalking a prom, although the Hamilton High location is retained (therefore, in theory, this takes place in the same universe as the previous two). The mystery element of the original, however, is thrown to the side.



PROM NIGHT (NELSON MCCORMICK, 2008)
Directed back-to-back on the same set/same locations as the equally badly remembered remake of *The Stepfather*, this glossy Hollywood remake actually has some style of its own but fails to reinvent the admittedly threadbare premise of the original. Scare-less and bloodless, this is a redux that few fans even cared to watch and, as *Prom Night* geeks (if any actually exist) might maintain, this is more of a redo of the fourth film than the first.

> and one of them, Peter Simpson, really went for it – although he thought he was buying a true story [laughs]. It was only after we got the deal, and everything was signed, that Paul had to reveal that this was all made up."

The confusing nature of motion picture tax laws, meanwhile, meant that everyone who worked on *Prom Night* had to be Canadian – with a sole exception permitted for an actor or actress who could be seen to guarantee worldwide sales.

Lynch, therefore, was able to get Curtis involved – and her deal also enabled her to appear in *Terror Train* (1980), another Canadian mystery-slasher that went into production at the same time (eagle-eyed fans will notice that the actress's hairstyle and hair length barely changes between the two...).

"I was actually put in the hotel room next to Jamie, so we became quite good friends," mentions Gray. "Paul knew *Halloween*, but I had not actually seen it and Jamie would tease me about that. So I remember one night in Toronto there was this repertoire theatre that was showing a late night double-bill of *Halloween* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Jamie found out and she said 'let's go, you need to see this movie' – she really wanted me to see what the fuss was all about. And I am glad she did because I thought *Halloween* was amazing and the crowd reaction to it was great as well.

"Coming out of the cinema, and seeing Jamie mobbed, with me next to her, was brilliant too [laughs]. I was saying to people: 'Hey, I am writing her new film' and that made me feel quite proud actually. Before that I was worried this might be just a cheap and easily forgotten horror movie. I did not even want to write it, I did it as a favour to Paul because he needed a Canadian [laughs]."



Also featuring a supporting role for the late Leslie Nielsen (before his iconic comedy turn in *Airplane!* and *The Naked Gun*), *Prom Night* draws some inspiration from *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) with its copious sequences of disco dancing as well as a frustratingly catchy pop soundtrack…

"Disco was actually pretty dead by the time this came out – so we sort of missed the boat," laughs Gray. "However, in the summer of 1979 we never anticipated that would happen and we all wanted to get the dancing scenes right. Jamie took it very seriously – she was a brilliant dancer, actually, and she had a big fight with Paul at one point because she was concerned he was not taking the choreography seriously enough. In the final film there is maybe more dancing than violence – although our big showdown effect was someone being decapitated at the prom. Again, *Friday The 13th* beat us to that [laughs]. Unfortunately, the actor who got decapitated had to put his head through a hole in the floor and he was epileptic. Being in a very enclosed space caused him to have a seizure and Paul had some medical training and rushed to help him. That was really scary. I actually cannot watch that scene when I revisit the movie because of the



Carrie was an influence.



The dancing has aged...poorly.



The studio asked for red herrings.

memories it brings back..."

A commercial success, and distributed by the independent genre house AVCO Embassy (who had also hit pay-dirt with *The Howling* and who would later distribute the likes of *The Fog* and *Escape From New York*), *Prom Night* would also lead to no fewer than three sequels and a 2008 remake.

Whilst the original motion picture might not have been quite as successful as *Halloween* or *Friday The 13th* it was nonetheless one of the few Eighties slasher knock-offs to inspire a series of its own...

"When AVCO Embassy saw it, they thought the identity of the killer was too obvious," admits Gray. "I told them I did what I could and added as many red herrings as I thought were plausible. In the end, they saw how the critics destroyed *Friday The 13th* so they decided to just put it into the theatres during the summer and target the youth market. They thought that the *Friday The 13th* crowd would pay money to see this and they were generally correct. However, if you wanted to review *Prom Night*, you had to buy a ticket because there were no preview screenings. I know Roger Ebert did that and he called us 'inept' [laughs]. He said that the people who watched this stuff offended him. However, we made a lot of money with it – it was a very successful film considering its budget."

Indeed, it was to little surprise when, in 2008, a glossy, big budget, PG-13 rated rehash hit theatres – to both critical and commercial derision. Featuring picture-perfect young performers and restrained violence, the movie flopped with both fans and critics. However, Gray had reason to be especially frustrated with the millennial redux of an old fear-favourite...

"We had the Writer's Guild go after the *Prom Night* remake but they could not get a case in the end," he sighs. "The producer of the 2008 film successfully argued that it was not actually based on our script because no one gets killed at the prom. They moved the action to a hotel, just after the prom [laughs]. I saw it and thought it was the same film – but I also think *I Know What You Did Last Summer* redid *Prom Night*. It is a very similar story. The good thing is that people looked at the *Prom Night* remake and hated it – but then they wanted to see what the original was like and now our movie actually has some pretty good notices. I never could have expected that back in 1980 [laughs]. It is strange how something that was once seen as the lowest form of entertainment eventually becomes regarded as a classic..."

The *Prom Night* collection is available on DVD from Network.



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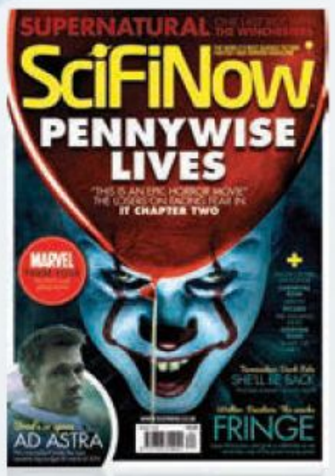
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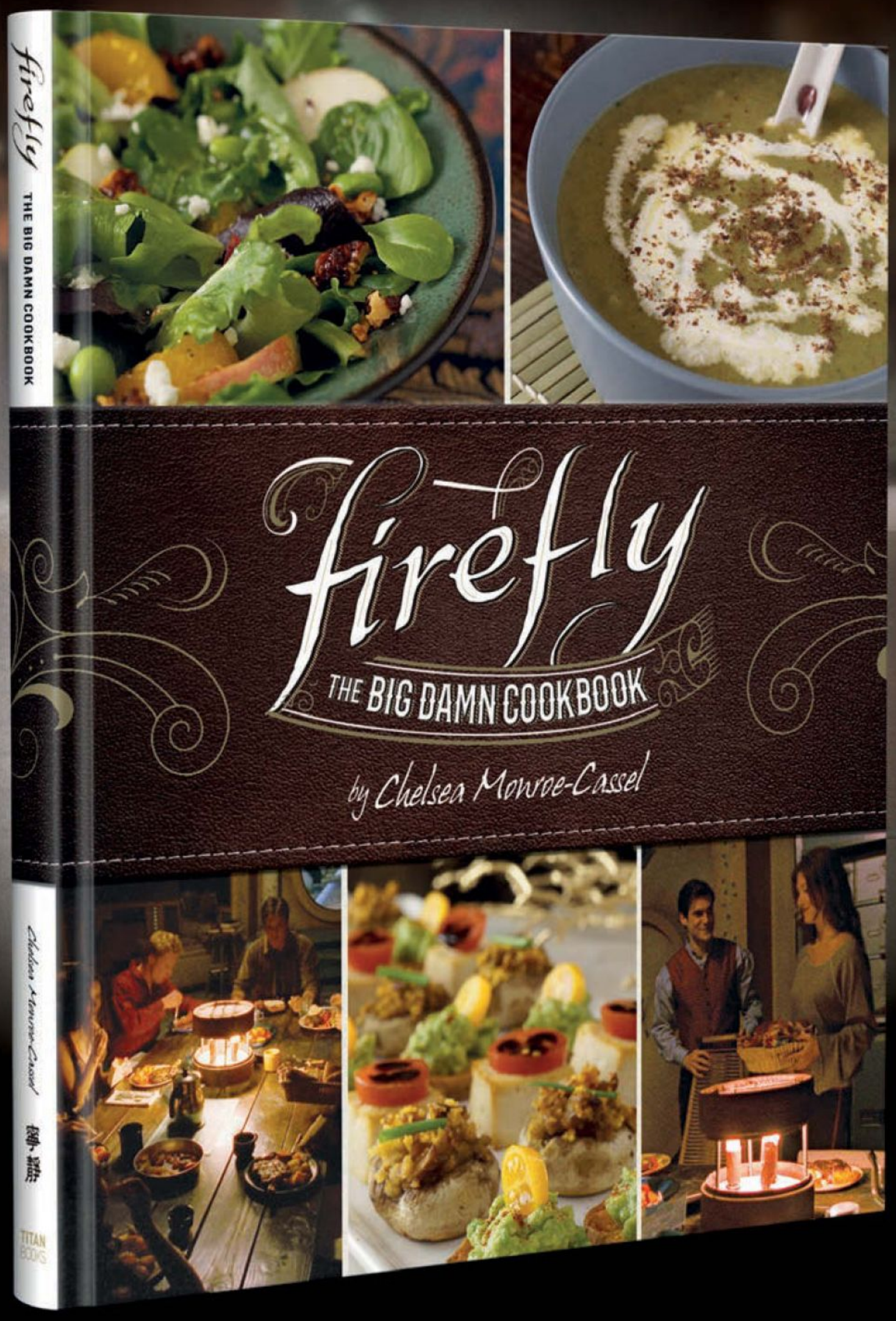
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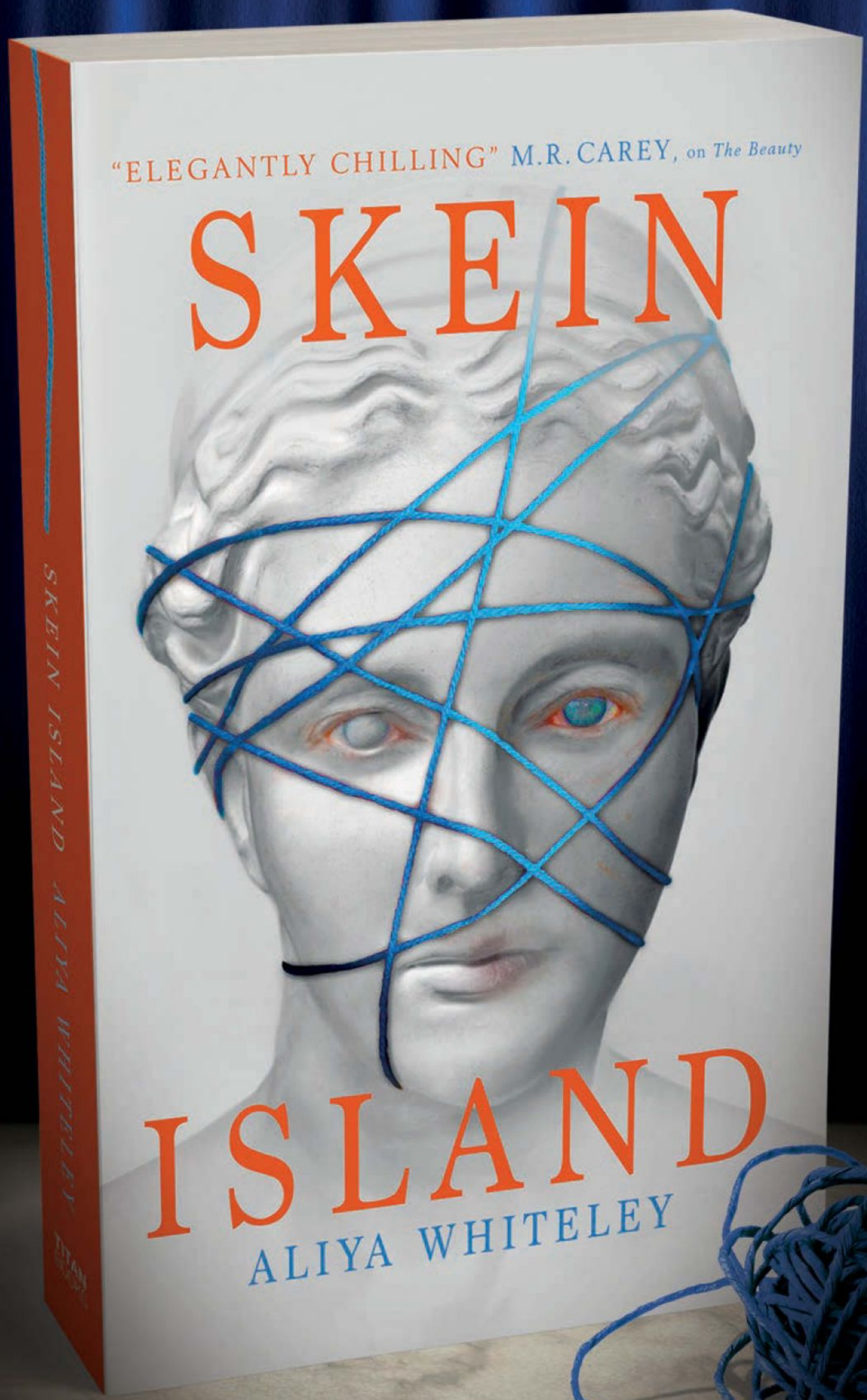
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